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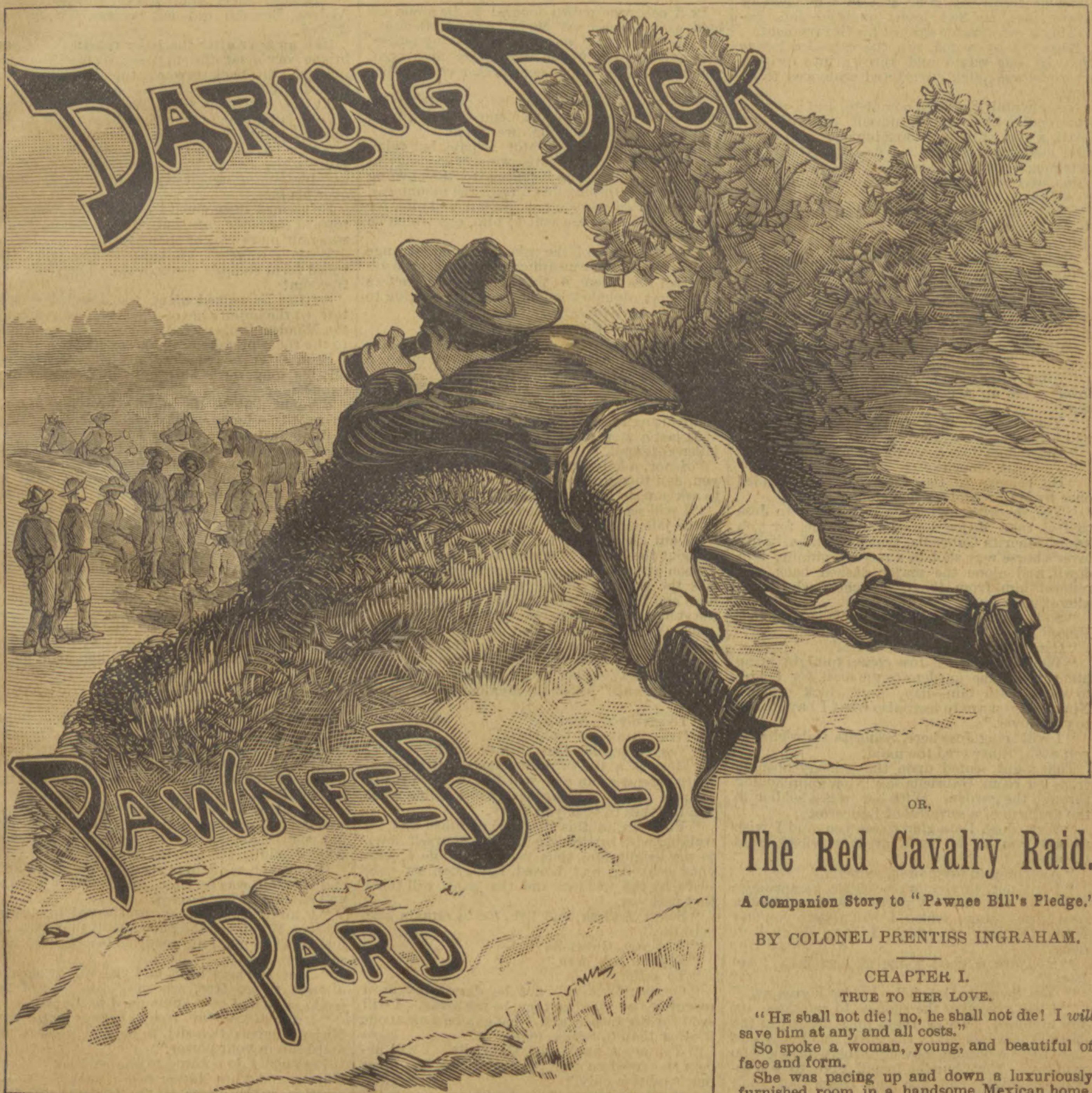
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"MAD CARL IS NOT DEAD, FOR THERE HE IS! HE HAS CAPTURED PAWNEE BILL AGAIN!"
CRIED DICK. "NOW FOR A RIDE FOR LIFE, FOR HE MUST BE SAVED!"

OR,
The Red Cavalry Raid.

A Companion Story to "Pawnee Bill's Pledge."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

TRUE TO HER LOVE.

"HE shall not die! no, he shall not die! I will save him at any and all costs."

So spoke a woman, young, and beautiful of face and form.

She was pacing up and down a luxuriously furnished room in a handsome Mexican home, on the outskirts of the City of Mexico.

Her own appearance, as well as her surround-

ings showed that she was the daughter of refined and wealthy parents—a family of Mexican aristocrats.

Gabriella Garcia was not eighteen years of age, when she is presented to the notice of the reader, and yet in her short life she had learned to love, with all the ardor of her warm nature, one who was a man with whose name the tongue of scandal was constantly busy.

A dashing officer of cavalry, inheriting a fortune, Major Andrea, young, handsome and gifted, had lived a life of luxury and dissipation that had made him famous, and dreaded by mothers who looked to the happiness of their daughters, rather than bartering them for gold or position.

The major had already been engaged in several fatal duels, had won a reputation as one who was neither merciful to man nor woman, and meeting Gabriella Garcia had, for the first time in his life, seemed to be forced to admit that he had a heart.

Many said that it was because the young girl was heiress to great wealth, but whatever the motive Major Andrea was influenced by, he certainly became very devoted to his new flame.

The dashing major had squandered his fortune, his credit was gone, and, in a moment of desperation, he had been inveigled into becoming a conspirator against his Government.

Betrayed by a foe, ere the conspiracy was ripe, he was seized and thrown into prison, where he was quickly tried and sentenced to be shot.

His downfall had been complete, and a person who could have made himself honored and loved, a man of brilliant attainments who could have risen high as a soldier, had squandered his patrimony, wrecked his honor, stained a noble name, and was lying in a dungeon awaiting to be shot as a conspirator.

He it was whom Gabriella Garria had said should not die—that she would save him at any cost.

And so, as she paced her room she plotted and planned to carry out her determination.

"One week more to live," she murmured, "just one week to-day he is to be shot—unless I save him. Now to see what a woman can do."

Calling her maid, a pretty Mexican girl, she said:

"Nina, you are to be married as soon as your lover saves up a certain sum of money, I believe?"

"Yes, senorita; in a year's time we hope it will be."

"When does Jose come to see you again?"

"To-night, senorita."

"He belongs to the Lancers, commanded once by Major Andrea Bonodel!"

"Yes, senorita, and it is a bitter blow to Jose to feel that Major Bonodel is to die, for you know, Senorita Gabriella, that once in battle my lover's horse was shot in a retreat, pinning him down, and alone the major dashed back and rescued him from the Comanches, who were almost upon him."

"So he remembers the deed of Major Bonodel, Nina?"

"Can he ever forget it, senorita?"

"Well, Nina, when Jose comes to-night bring him through the gardens to me here, for I wish to speak with him—nay, don't look jealous, Nina, for you are to hear also what I have to say to your lover."

"I will bring Jose here, Senorita Gabriella, as you wish," answered the maid.

That night, seated upon the balcony opening from her room, Gabriella saw Nina approaching through the garden. With her was a soldier in the uniform of a sergeant of Lancers.

"Well, Jose, I am glad to see you, and I wish to ask you to do me a great service," said Gabriella.

"Anything in my power, senorita."

"I will not, as you are a soldier, compromise you by saying what my purpose is; but, I have a neat little cottage which I will give to you and Nina, the day the work I have in view is done."

"You are a good judge of horseflesh, I believe?"

"Yes, Senorita Gabriella, I know horses well."

"I will give you the money to purchase six fine animals. One of these must be left at the Mendez Inn just out of the town, and you are to take there a bundle, leaving it there for one who will call. That bundle I will give to you to-morrow night, and you had better not go in your uniform."

"Yes, senorita."

"The other horses you are to send to various

points on the trail to the Rio Grande, say twenty miles apart, and leave them to be called for."

"Yes, senorita."

"Now, here is the money, Jose, and I wish you to get leave to-morrow, and then do my bidding. You might send the horses to the different posts, which you must know, traveling the road as you have, by a faithful messenger."

"I will, senorita, I will."

"But, they must get away as early in the morning as possible, and to-morrow night you are to take the horse to Mendez Inn, and also the bundle."

"I understand, senorita."

Then Gabriella Garcia counted out the money to the young soldier, and added:

"The cottage is yours as soon as you have done this for me, and I will furnish it for Nina, too, so that your home will be all ready for your bride. Good-night, Jose, and do not fail me."

"I will not, senorita," and the soldier departed, while Gabriella murmured:

"Now, to do my part to save Andrea, for he shall not die."

CHAPTER II.

THE PADRE.

In a cell, where men doomed to die alone are held as prisoners, sat Major Andrea Bonodel, the one-time pet of society, the dashing officer, and now a man whose days were numbered, who was to die as a conspirator ere another week had gone by.

None honor him now, and he is deserted by all save his creditors, who still hope to wring from him a little of the gold he owes them.

The handsome conspirator is pale, but calm, and he stands by the grated window looking out into the darkness, and listening to the howling of a storm sweeping down from the mountains.

That day one person has remembered him, for a small cake has been sent to him, one which he had ever fancied.

Upon the icing of the cake were some strange figures, apparently meaning nothing, yet the soldier had read them, as they were the characters of a secret alphabet he had used in writing to one of his lady-loves.

What he saw there read:

"Say that you wish to see Father Felix if he calls to-night. You have steadfastly refused to see a priest, but you must see him."

This was what Major Andrea Bonodel made out of the characters, and he stood watching and waiting to see if Father Felix would call.

At last a step came toward his cell, and the jailer appeared.

"Senor, a holy father is here begging to see you, and though I told him it would be useless to ask you, he urged that I must come."

"I will see him," was the unexpected response to the jailer, who said:

"I am glad, senor, for a man ought not die without the benefit of the church."

Soon after the jailer returned, and with him was the gown-enveloped form of a padre, his head and face also being hidden by his hood, for the storm was a severe one without.

The iron door was opened and the priest stepped into the cell, the jailer saying that he would return within an hour to conduct him out.

"Well, holy father, why have you honored me with a call?" asked the Mexican officer, coldly.

"To save you, Andrea!"

"Great heavens! Gabriella!"

"Yes, Gabriella—here to save you!"

"Here is a list of where horses await you. At the Mendez Inn you will find a room ready for you. In it is a disguise, while a fine horse will be there to bear you away."

"You can, in this disguise of mine, and by walking with bended knees, bring yourself down to my height, and thus pass out, while I, with your coat on, and bowed head, can sit over there by the window and the jailer will think that it is you."

"So go, Andrea, and live, for to remain here is to die."

"And you, Gabriella?"

"Will remain here."

"To suffer?"

"Oh, no; for I will not be discovered until morning and you can then be far away. I will send for my father, and what can be done about it other than to release me?"

"You are a noble girl, Gabriella. I will accept the freedom that you offer me, but upon one condition only."

"Name it, Andrea."

"That you become my wife."

"No, no! A delay now—"

"You do not understand me, Gabriella; I mean that when I am safe, and far from here, if I send for you will you come to me, come and be my wife, and let me devote my life to the one who saved it?"

"I will come, Andrea, for you alone do I love."

"The Virgin bless you, Gabriella, and hold you in her keeping."

"Yes, if I remain here it will be to die, and you offer me the chance of liberty, so I grasp it."

"I am deeply pained that you must remain here, Gabriella, but, as you say, they can do nothing with you for your act, only release you, though your love for me, the conspirator, will become known."

"What care I for that, Andrea? We cannot command our loves."

"Then I am content, Gabriella, or will be when you come to me and become my wife."

"I will come, Andrea, when you send for me," was the prompt reply.

Then she told him all of her plot, just what he was to do, and handing him a purse heavy with gold, said:

"You will need this, Andrea. Don't refuse it."

"Heaven bless you, brave woman!" and Andrea Bonodel did not refuse the money offered.

Half an hour after the jailer returned. Over in the corner sat the supposed form of the conspirator, his back toward the door, his face buried in his hands.

At the iron door stood the supposed priest. As the jailer came up he placed his finger to his lips and pointed toward the prisoner.

"You have conquered him, holy father," the jailer whispered as the padre passed out, drawing his robe more closely about him, his cowl over his face.

He seemed disinclined to speak, and passed on toward the outer gate, out into the storm, which was now more violent than ever.

With a wave of his hand to the jailer the robed form stepped through the outer portal to freedom!

Swiftly he walked along the deserted streets toward the outer edge of the city, and reaching the Mendez Inn, entered, and asked to be shown to the room prepared for Father Felix.

Soon after he came out, his moustachios cut off, his long, dark hair gone and dressed as a vaquero.

Slipping out to the stables he found a man there with a horse saddled and bridled.

In an instant he was in the saddle and away upon his ride for life, for long miles lay between him and safety, and the five horses awaiting him on the road to the Rio Grande, must be ridden far and hard ere he could feel that his escape from death was assured.

When the morning came the storm had cleared away without, but a fearful one was waging within the walls of the jail, for when breakfast was taken to Andrea Bonodel, the smiling face of Gabriella Garcia peered through the bars.

She sent for the jailer, told how she had plotted the escape of her lover, revealed nothing as to when or how he had gone, and then added:

"Now I am ready to meet any punishment the Government may see fit to inflict upon me."

CHAPTER III.

AN OUTLAW'S BRIDE.

News of the escape of Major Andrea Bonodel spread like wildfire through the city, and troops of cavalry were sent in all directions scouring the country, while soldiers searched the houses in the town to be sure that he was not hidden there.

The daring act of Senorita Gabriella Garcia was lauded by some, and condemned by others; but she became a heroine, and all wondered what would be the penalty for her bold act.

Her father, a distinguished man, high in official position, was sent for, and found her calm and smiling at her success.

"I loved him, father, so I saved him from death. Whatever the punishment that may be meted out to me, I am ready to bear it," she had said, composedly.

"Confess where he is, and you will at once be allowed to go free, senorita," said one of the junta, who had been summoned to the jail.

"I did not set him free to betray him, senor. Major Andrea Bonodel is beyond your reach, and I am in your power."

They could do nothing to one so beautiful, an heiress, and whose father was a man of exalted position, so the anger of the Government was visited upon the poor jailer. As he had allowed the prisoner to escape, not knowing a man from

a woman—or, it so being paid for his silence—the unfortunate man was led out and shot to death. A victim the officials must have; so the jailer suffered, while Gabriella Garcia returned to her home with her father.

It was a cruel, a bitter blow to Gabriella to have the jailer the sufferer, yet she felt that injustice had caused it, and she had to submit.

As for herself, she became indeed a heroine, men loving her the more, and women envying her for what she had done for the one she loved.

The beautiful girl did not bide herself, after her act, for she seemed to crave excitement, and went more than ever into society, until it was candidly admitted that she was the belle of the City of Mexico.

Six months had Andrea Garcia been gone; then came strange rumors of his doings; some declared that he had gone to Texas and become a Ranger; others that he had turned gambler and was dwelling in New Orleans, while by another report he had allied himself to a band of outlaws of the Rio Grande and become their chief.

Efforts were made to find out if Don Desperado, the noted guerrilla chief of the Rio Grande, was indeed the fugitive officer, Andrea Garcia, yet no one seemed to be able to tell if it were so.

Of course Gabriella heard these stories, yet never spoke of her fugitive lover to any one.

She had given the cottage to Jose, and he had married the pretty Nina, no one suspecting that the gift of the heiress was more than through friendship for her maid.

One day Nina came to the elegant home of the Garcias, and handed to Gabriella a note.

Eagerly she broke it open when she learned that it had been left at the cottage by a vaquero who said he would call for an answer upon the following day.

The letter was as follows, and written in the characters of the secret alphabet, in which the notification on the cake sent to his cell had been. Eagerly she read it, her face flushing and paling by turns:

"I shall hold you to your promise to become my wife. I am now ready and in position to give you a home, which, if you love me as I do you, will be a happy one notwithstanding its surroundings.

"If you will come to me, to keep your pledge, I will send a guide to conduct you to a certain hacienda where there will be a priest awaiting you, and I will arrive about the time you do.

"I shall live in the fond hope that you still love the man whose life you saved."

Such was the letter, and pressing it to her lips Gabriella Garcia said fervently:

"Love him! Yes, with all my heart and soul I love him, be he what he may, and I will go to him."

The letter was answered, also in the cipher alphabet, and it was dispatched by the messenger who had brought the one from the man she idolized.

The answer came before long to the cottage of Nina, and she at once sought the home of Gabriella Garcia, and placed it in her hands, with the words:

"The messenger will be at my home, senorita, just after nightfall, and be ready to guide you whither you would go; but, oh! my dear, noble lady, pause ere you take a step which may brand your whole future life with sorrow, and perhaps shame!"

"I have decided, my good Nina, and I will be at your home to-night. I will also send there, as though it were a present to you, some things I would take with me."

Nina left with a sad heart, for she knew just what her mistress meant to do, and her husband, the sergeant, had told her that there was not the least doubt but that Major Bonodel had become leagued with a band of Rio Grande outlaws.

At the appointed hour Gabriella was at Nina's home. She had proceeded there, mounted upon her best horse, and had left word that she was going to the home of a relative for the night.

The next morning a letter was to be handed to her father, telling him just what she had done.

The guide was at Nina's little house at the appointed time, and the two set off together on the road, Gabriella's luggage being carried on a led horse, which the man had brought for that purpose.

Thus did she start upon the life before her, led only by her deep love for the man whom nothing could turn her against.

With streaming eyes Nina bade her farewell, and that night, when Jose came, she told him of her sorrow at the going of one who had been their dearest friend.

The next morning the letter was left at the home of the Senor Garcia, telling him all.

The proud, strong man was hurt terribly at what he read, and he groaned:

"She has gone to become an outlaw's bride, for I have the proofs, alas! of just what Bonodel has become."

"My God! it is fearful, but it is too late now to save her; but, by Heaven, the world shall not know her shame! No, no! I will say that she has been kidnapped, and have instant search made for her, offering large ransom for her return to me."

"No, the world must not know," and calling up his servants Senor Garcia spread the alarm, soldiers were called out, and the whole city soon rung with the news that the beautiful Gabriella Garcia had been recently decoyed from her home and kidnapped by a band of outlaws, who looked for a large ransom for her restoration to her father's arms.

CHAPTER IV.

DON DESPERADO.

THE "Robbers of the Rio Grande," as a desperate band of outlaws were known, had their retreat in a mountain range of Mexico, amid fastnesses where they defied dislodgment from the soldiers.

In fact, as they operated mostly upon the American side of the river, the Mexican authorities made no strenuous efforts to hunt them down.

They had been under the command of a chief who was said to be an American, and who was known as Don Desperado.

The band was largely composed of deserters from the Mexican Army, and all were held under military discipline by their chief.

But one day their American leader disappeared most mysteriously. It was supposed that he had been slain.

It was also thought by some that he had been captured, and a few believed that he had deserted them, for he had left nothing of value in his cabin that they could find.

Just then along came a man whom some of the outlaws had served under in the Mexican Army—Major Andrea Bonodel, and he came to throw his fortunes with theirs.

He heard of the disappearance of the American chief, and at once said that he would combat all claimants for the position.

This he did, defeating those who sought the honor of leadership, and so effectually ridding the band of them that he would never dread their appearing again as rivals, unless they came in ghostly form.

Thus did Andrea Bonodel step into the authority of the lost chief, and he took his name as well as his place, for he was pleased to be known as Don Desperado.

The months passed away and the new chief had shown that he was a daring and able commander, though he ruled his men with a rod of iron.

One afternoon the chief rode away from the stronghold, and alone. His direction lay toward the interior of Mexico. He was elegantly dressed as a Mexican cavalier, and mounted upon a horse equipped with the costliest of trappings.

It was just nightfall when he halted at a secluded hacienda, and was readily admitted and bade welcome by the Mexican host, who was secretly his agent for the disposal of booty.

"Has the lady arrived, Senor Feraro?" asked Don Desperado eagerly.

"Yes, captain, some hours ago and she is now resting."

"And the padre?"

"I sent over to the Mission to bid him be here to supper, señor."

"He knows nothing?"

"No more than that you and the lady are friends of mine who have come at my invitation to be united beneath my roof."

"That is well, Senor Feraro."

"Now, when the lady is ready to receive me I will be glad, for we must take saddle again before midnight."

"Then you are not to remain my guests, captain?"

"No, I dare not trust myself so far from my band."

"I shall go on a raid soon into Texas, and leave the booty at the retreat on the river for you to send after."

"Yes, Senor Captain."

"And I believe you have a balance in your hands from the last sale?"

"Yes, captain, I will pay it to you to-night," was the reply, and the ranchero left the room to see if the lady guest under his roof would receive Don Desperado.

The latter had not long to wait before Gabriella

Garcia came into the room, and with a glad cry she threw herself into her lover's arms.

After awhile he said:

"You are a noble girl, Gabriella, and in taking this step you act blindly."

"Love is blind, Andrea."

"And you have nothing to ask me?"

"Nothing, for I love you and am ready to keep my pledge."

Soon after Senor Feraro came in to announce the arrival of the priest, and half an hour after Gabriella Garcia, acting with utter blindness toward what the man she loved had become, was wedded to Andrea Bonodel.

A wedding supper followed and at midnight the young bride rode away from the hacienda accompanied only by her outlaw husband.

The moon shone as bright as day, and at a gallop the outlaw went toward his mountain retreat.

A ride of several hours, and just before dawn a ringing hail came from a cliff above them, for they were passing through a canyon.

The chief gave response, and it seemed satisfactory, for he was told to pass on.

And up the steep trail he led the way, into a heavily timbered valley among the mountains.

Other challenges came from unseen men and were promptly answered by the chief, and continuing their way they came to a hamlet, a score of rude huts plainly visible in the moonlight.

Up at the head of the valley was a larger cabin than the others, and built evidently with an eye to comfort and convenience.

A piazza ran across the front, and through the open door and windows a bright light shone.

"Gabriella, my wife, this is your home, for I have had this cabin built for you, apart from the homes of my people."

"Here I will visit you, when my duties keep me not in the saddle and upon the trail, and here I wish you to reign as queen."

"Come, let me welcome you to your new home."

He lifted her from the saddle as he spoke, and led her into what was really a cozy home.

There stood a peon woman, who bent in obeisance to the fair bride, while the chief said:

"Wanda, this is to be your mistress, my wife, and the queen of my band."

Gabriella extended her hand in greeting, and said a pleasant word to the peon woman.

Then she turned to her husband and asked:

"And now tell me, Andrea, why this far-away retreat is your home?"

"Have you forgotten, Gabriella, that I am a fugitive, that you saved me from death?"

"Have you forgotten that I am a hunted man by my own people? A conspirator under sentence of death?"

"There was but one life before me, and that life I chose."

"A lawless life, yes, yet I live in hopes of one day gaining riches that will enable us to go far from Mexico and live in peace and happiness."

"But now, my Gabriella, I will tell you the truth, for it is your right to know it."

"I will tell you that you are the wife of him who is known as Don Desperado, the chief of the Rio Grande Raiders."

"Ah, Andrea, I feared it! but I love you, and nothing shall part us," was the low reply of the unfortunate woman whose blind love had wrecked her life.

CHAPTER V.

THE AMERICAN DON DESPERADO.

THE name of Don Desperado had become a terror along both the Mexican and Texan shores of the Rio Grande, and a reward was set upon the head of the chief and each one of the robber band.

The kidnapping idea which the pride of Senor Garcia had set afloat regarding the mysterious disappearance of his beautiful daughter had been generally believed, though a few wondered that the kidnappers had never brought a claim for ransom.

The old Mexican was sympathized with, and the real fate of Gabriella Garcia was set down as unfathomable, though a few suspected the truth when it was known that with Don Desperado was a woman, always veiled, yet said by those who had seen her to be very beautiful.

It was known that Don Desperado was the conspirator Bonodel, but as he had captured a Government train, in which were papers containing some ugly secrets against high officials, no effort was really made to get possession of him, for with certain facts in his possession he could be a dangerous prisoner indeed.

Thus time went by and the Rio Grande

Raiders still escaped justice, and the chief it was said was growing rich from his robberies.

Some two years after the disappearance of Gabriella Garcia from her home, two mounted men crossed the Rio Grande early one morning, from the Texas to the Mexican shore.

One of these men rode in advance of the other, and to his saddle-horn was fastened the lariat that led the other's horse.

Both men were well mounted and equipped, only one was fully armed, and upon his saddle hung the weapons of the man who followed him.

The latter's hands were also manacled, and from ankle to ankle beneath his horse extended a chain, showing that he was completely ironed beyond escape.

The men were as different in appearance as daylight and darkness.

The man in advance was a tall, powerfully built fellow, quick in his movements for a large man, and with a dark, sinister, wicked face, the eyes being strangely wild and piercing.

It was a handsome face as the word goes, but one to dread rather than admire.

He was dressed in velvet jacket, buckskin leggings stuck in top-boots, massive spurs and a sombrero.

The other was a man slightly below the medium height, yet possessing an athletic, graceful form.

His face was one to tie to if we wanted a friend, womanly almost in its perfect features, with eyes that were brilliant yet gentle in expression, and long blonde waving hair, in striking contrast to the long black hair of his captor, for such he was.

The prisoner was well-mounted, and had been thoroughly armed, but the captor carried his weapons now.

He was dressed in a blue army jacket with shoulder-straps in which was a red arrow, and his buckskin leggings were fringed down the seam and stuck in his light cavalry boots.

His sombrero was black, encircled by a gold cord and looped up with a red coral pin representing a crossed arrow and bowie-knife.

Altogether he was a very striking personage, and his face was as serene as a May morn, for he did not appear to be in the least troubled at his being the captive of a man whose face showed a merciless nature.

The captor was a man who had won fame first as Don Desperado, the same who had mysteriously disappeared from his band of Raiders, as has been said, and into whose shoes stepped Andrea Bonodel as Don Desperado Number Two.

His own humor had caused him to drop the band and go to Texas, and there his wild orgies and desperate nature had soon won him the name of Mad Carl the Cowboy.

Securing a position as cowboy on a cattle-king's ranch, Mad Carl soon rose to be the chief of the Cowboy Rangers, and as such was often wont to beat back the very Mexican Raiders whom he had once commanded and led upon raids.

With his beard shaved off, and his hair allowed to grow long, the Mexican Raiders never knew their old chief in Mad Carl the Cowboy.

With the exception of his wild nature, and quarterly carousals when he would go to the settlements, Mad Carl was a model cowboy chief; but when on one of his orgies his desperate nature rendered him a terror to all.

And this man's life had promised well in boyhood, but the creature of cruel circumstances, accused of a murder of which he was innocent, driven with his mother to fly from a father whose crimes had sent him to prison for life, a half-brother, whose guilty deeds had sentenced him to the gallows, from which he had escaped by taking a keeper's life, to still dog his step-mother and brother, ruining the latter's every prospect in life, and breaking the heart of the former, Mad Carl had fled from the destiny that had wrecked him, and became the chief of the Mexican Raiders.

Such was the man that was now leading a prisoner into Mexico, his rival, as he believed, for the band of Captain Sam Vail's pretty governess, on the ranch where Mad Carl had been captain of the cowboys.

She had told him that she was not free, that she was the wife of Pawnee Bill, captain of Indian cavalry in the army.*

And this so maddened the cowboy chief that

* Gordon W. Lillie, scout, guide and interpreter, held commission of captain of a band of Pawnee Indians, who were made Government scouts.—THE AUTHOR.

he vowed revenge upon May Lillie, the pretty governess of Paradise Ranch, and captured her husband, to gain his revengeful satisfaction by torturing him.

But through the pluck of Daring Dick, Captain Vail's fourteen year old son, the cowboys of the ranch, with May Lillie at their head, had been able to rescue Pawnee Bill before the prisoner and his captive crossed the Rio Grande, for Mad Carl was making for his old command of Raiders.

But for May Lillie, the Cowboy Rangers would have made short work of their old chief, but she, feeling that he was mad indeed, had gotten him sent to an asylum for the insane.

But no bolts and bars could hold a man so desperate as Mad Carl, and making his escape, he again started upon his trail of revenge against May Lillie through her husband.

Disguising himself as an army courier, he had met Pawnee Bill upon the trail, and thus catching him off his guard, had again made him a prisoner, and was pushing on with his victim to the retreat of the Rio Grande Raiders, unmindful of the fact that there was a Don Desperado then their chief, and who was not the man to willingly yield command to him.

But then Mad Carl never weighed odds, and so went on to the Raiders' retreat, coolly saying to his prisoner:

"I shall kill the man who has taken my place, and be chief myself."

"And I will enjoy the fun, with a hope that it will be a case of the Kilkenny cats," serenely responded his prisoner, Pawnee Bill.

CHAPTER VI.

DARING DICK.

CAPTAIN SAM VAIL'S ranch, known as "Paradise," was the best in the part of Texas where it was located.

It was well situated upon a rise, on the banks of a swiftly flowing stream, and with timber enough about it to shelter it from the cold northerns that often swept across the prairies, which surrounded it upon all sides, with far-away ranges visible in the distance.

Thousands of cattle dotted the plains, and a couple of miles down the river were the cowboys' camps, where Mad Carl Grafton had long held sway over the three dozen herders known as the Cowboy Rangers, and who had made a reputation as gallant men and true in fighting the Raiders and Comanches which the ranchmen had to contend against in their life far away on the frontier.

From a large cabin at first, Paradise homestead had been added to time and again, until it had become a formidable structure.

It was well furnished, though the furniture had been brought many long miles in wagons; there was a piano, a fine library and all to make life enjoyable.

The captain, his wife, Dick, a boy of fourteen, Violet a sweet little maid of twelve, and a younger daughter of eight comprised the household, at least until the coming of May Lillie, the wife of Pawnee Bill, as governess to the children.

A bright, pretty, brave little woman too was this same governess, who had been reared on the border, and whose heart had been won by her hero of heroes, Gordon Lillie, the Captain of the Pawnee Cavalry.

Skilled as a shot with revolver and rifle, riding as fearlessly as a Comanche, and as expert in throwing a lasso as any cowboy on the plains, May Lillie had become known as the Queen of the Lariat.

Beloved by all who knew her it was no wonder that Mad Carl had learned to love her, for her marriage had been kept a secret.

She had thoroughly tamed the Mad Cowboy, and yet when she told him she did not, could not love him, that she was a married woman, it had transformed him once more into a human fiend, and so it was that he had struck at her heart through the man she loved.

Daring Dick Vail was devoted to his governess, and the boy had proven himself a hero in more ways than one.

The cowboys had encouraged him in many ways, and Dick had become so accomplished as a rider, lariat-thrower, shot and trailer, that he had been given the name of the Little Wonder.

Taught to rely upon himself, Daring Dick felt equal to undertaking a man's duties at any time, and as for fear it was wholly foreign to his nature.

His word went with the cowboys, and his father had implicit trust in his judgment.

Such was the household at Vail Ranch at the time this story opens.

Pawnee Bill had come to visit his wife, hav-

ing a month's leave from his command, and it was there that Mad Carl had captured him.

When leaving to rejoin his Indian cavalry, it was that the escaped madman had again captured him.

In his disguise of an old borderman, Mad Carl had been met by May Lillie and Daring Dick, on their way home after escorting Gordon Lillie on his trail back to his command.

The boy's keen eyes had read a resemblance in the face of the pretended frontier courier to Mad Carl, and this dread that it might be he, had caused him to go back and pick up his trail, after May Lillie had reached the ranch.

He found that the pretended courier's trail overtook that of Pawnee Bill's, and what he discovered caused him to feel sure that his suspicion was right—that the man was Mad Carl, and that Captain Lillie had again fallen into his merciless hands through some trickery, for in open warfare, the young officer was a match for any man.

So back like the wind rode Daring Dick; his story was told, and Buckskin Charlie* the captain of the cowboys after the flight of Mad Carl, with his men were soon ready for the trail.

Captain Vail also went along, and nothing could have kept May Lillie back when she learned that Mad Carl again had her husband in his power.

Away went the party on the trail, the Little Wonder, mounted upon a fresh horse, leading the way.

His story of his discovery was taken without hesitation, and this saved a long ride to the spot where Pawnee Bill had been overtaken by the pretended courier, thus giving the cowboy trailers an advantage of hours.

Boldly across the Rio Grande they went, for thither the trail of the two horses led them. They were determined to press on to the retreat of the Raiders, for well they knew now where Mad Carl was going.

The trail indicated that he had been traveling leisurely, showing no anxiety about pursuit, as he little dreamed that the keen eyes of Daring Dick had penetrated his disguise.

Well the gallant band of Texans knew their danger in invading the land of Mexico, but Captain Vail hoped to explain the situation if soldiers were encountered, while, if lawless bands interfered, they would have to fight.

With May Lillie, the Lariat Queen, at their head, Buckskin Charlie and his daring Cowboy Rangers would risk any danger.

At length, when ascending the trail leading to the mountain retreat of the Raiders, a woman was seen approaching them.

"It is Captain Lillie!" cried Daring Dick, spurting forward to meet Pawnee Bill, while the Lariat Queen closely followed.

And Pawnee Bill it was, free from his irons, no longer Mad Carl's prisoner, and on the trail back to Texas.

CHAPTER VII.

PAWNEE BILL'S STORY.

"How did you escape from that desperate man, Gordon?" asked May Lillie.

"Did you kill him?" Daring Dick questioned with a hope that such was the case.

"No, Dick, I did not kill him; but Mad Carl is dead," was the answer of Pawnee Bill.

But he would say no more then, and urged that a rapid retreat should be made for the other shore of the Rio Grande.

"This suspense will kill me, Charlie," said Daring Dick to Buckskin Charlie, as they rode back on the retreat.

"Yes, you are dying to know, Little Wonder, as I can see, and I confess I am as curious as a woman myself to know how Captain Lillie escaped," was Buckskin Charlie's response.

That night the cowboys camped on the Texas shore of the Rio Grande, and after supper was over with, Pawnee Bill said in his quiet way:

"Now I will tell you my story of how I escaped from Mad Carl.

"Believing him to be a courier, as he said, sent from the general, I had no suspicions of foul play, and was struck from my saddle by a stunning blow with his revolver.

"When I regained consciousness I was handcuffed and my ankles were chained together.

"He had me wholly in his power, I was disarmed, and he started to the Rio Grande with me, not having the slightest dread of pursuit, and it puzzles me to know how you found my capture out."

* Charles Owens, a well known borderman, and pard of Buckskin Sam and Texas Jack.

"It was Dick's work, Gordon," said May Lillie and she explained just what the Little Wonder had done.

"You are a trump, Dick, and will make a name for yourself some day," said Gordon Lillie, and Dick felt proud of the praise of a man like Pawnee Bill.

"Well, I could offer no resistance," he continued.

"I was wholly at his mercy, so took matters as quietly as I could."

"He knew the way well, and told me that he had once been chief of the Raiders, and was known as Don Desperado."

"He had tired of it, however, so had gone to Texas and turned honest cowboy."

"Then he said he would assume his place as chief again, and when I asked what about the Don Desperado then in command, he laughed in his reckless way and said there could be but one Don Desperado, and the best man would have the name."

"When we met the first sentinel of the band, Mad Carl gave his signal, and the guard welcomed him back and we passed in."

"We reached the retreat, a group of huts away up in the mountain-tops, and reached by a canyon which one man could defend against twenty."

"Some of the old men of the band recalled him as their chief, and gave him a welcome, and I at once saw that the leader they then had was not popular with the band."

"That leader soon appeared, a handsome-faced Mexican, once an officer of Lanceros in the army."

"Mad Carl coolly claimed his old position, and challenged the Raiders' captain to fight for it."

"Well, fight they did, and I greatly enjoyed the duel with swords, for both handled a blade splendidly."

"But Mad Carl was victor; the band cheered him and escorted him to his quarters, taking me along, for he said to them that I was a prisoner held for ransom."

"Soon after a woman appeared upon the scene."

"A woman?"

"Yes, May, and young and beautiful."

"She was the wife of the slain Don Desperado, claimed to have been forced into a marriage with him, and thanked Mad Carl for killing him."

"Her quarters were back up the valley, and she invited Mad Carl to come and have supper with her, and bring me, and she would explain all."

"Well, Mad Carl went, taking me along, and I was freed of my irons for the occasion."

"She set forth a tempting repast, and we both ate heartily; but suddenly I saw that Mad Carl seemed dazed, and soon after he fell from his chair."

"The woman had not been forced into a marriage with the outlaw captain, for she had left home to marry him, and she had played her part well to seek quick revenge."

"She had poisoned Mad Carl."

"Are you sure, Gordon?"

"Perfectly, May."

"He has as many lives as a cat."

"Well, they were all snuffed out, I assure you, by that dose of poison."

"The man was dead, I am sure, and the woman told me to go under the guidance of a peon woman, by a secret pass, and make my escape."

"I was not long in taking her advice, I assure you, and so it was that I met you this morning going to my rescue, which I must tell you could not have been effected by force with five times the number with you, Captain Vail."

"But the woman, Gordon?" asked May Lillie.

"She was to make her escape, as soon as the peon woman returned from guiding me to the trail, and she told me she would seek her home, now that the man she loved had been slain."

"And the band?"

"Never went near her quarters, and would not discover until morning that Mad Carl had also been killed."

"Then a placard the woman intended to put upon her door would tell of her revenge against their new chief, and of her flight with the peon attendant."

"What a strange woman, Gordon," said May.

"All women be strange, Miss May," said an old cowboy, who evidently spoke from some experience he had had in his life with the fair sex.

"I guess you are right, Baldy," laughed Pawnee Bill, and as it was urgent that he should, being once again free, press on his way to his

command, the party started upon the back trail, the captain of Indian cavalry branching off at the pass, the others going on to Paradise Ranch.

And upon all rested a feeling of relief that Mad Carl was dead, and he who defied all men, had fallen by the hand of a woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S REVENGE.

THAT Gabriella was the one who had sought revenge for the death of her husband, the reader has surmised.

She had been at first appalled when she beheld the dead body of Don Desperado, the one she so madly loved, and for awhile she had yielded to her grief.

But then her Mexican nature was aroused to avenge him, and she at once acted and with cunning, daring and determination.

With her husband dead she would have no protector in that band of lawless men.

The new chief had begun with a death-blow, so how would he treat her, a defenseless woman.

She made what inquiries she could about this bold man who had come to take her husband's place, and learned who he was, and that he had with him a prisoner.

Then she went to the quarters of the new chief and told her story of a forced marriage to Andrea Bonodel.

The result was told in Pawnee Bill's story, of how the beautiful avenger had struck her blow against Mad Carl.

The prisoner she had set free, with his weapons brought from the chief's cabin by the peon woman, and his horse was also given him to ride back on the trail to safety.

Where he had sunk from his chair upon the floor of the cabin, Mad Carl still lay, while Gabriella, with seemingly no horror of the dead, went about her work in getting together what things she would take with her, by the time the peon woman returned.

At last the woman came back and reported having seen Pawnee Bill through the secret pass to the trail down the mountain.

Then the horses were saddled, the luggage strapped on, and Gabriella turned from the woman and walked off to a group of pines where there was a new-made grave.

It was there she had bade the men who had brought her husband's body to the cabin, bury him.

Down upon her knees she dropped, and pressing her face to the earth she cried:

"Andrea! Andrea! if you could only come back to me, my darling!"

"And this is the end?"

"Just as you had saved gold enough to support us, and we were going far from here, where you could atone by good deeds for your evil ones, you have been taken from me."

"Oh, Andrea! this is the end, the bitter, cruel end for me of all my love."

"But I have avenged you, my husband, for your slayer lies yonder dead, though he knew not whose hand it was that struck the blow, that I had made him die for his act in killing you."

"And now, Andrea, my loved and lost one, I must bid you farewell—forever!"

She pressed her lips to the cold ground, and her grief was frightful to behold.

But quickly her iron will nerved her to calmness, and going to where the peon woman waited with the horses, she sprung lightly into the saddle and led the way out of the mountain retreat by the secret pass.

But she knew well the way, and branched off ere she came to the main trail, descending into a valley and crossing a stream.

"Now we must ride for the hacienda with all speed," she said, and she led the way.

It was soon after sunrise that she came to the hacienda, the one where she had met Andrea Bonodel, to become his wife.

The ranchero gave her a warm welcome, had food prepared for her, and hearing the story of what had occurred at the retreat of the Raiders, furnished horses for the journey to be at once continued, sending two of his men along as an escort and guides.

Gabriella set the pace at which they traveled, and pressed rapidly on until nightfall.

Then they camped for the night, the men were sent back, and the two women went on alone the next day.

It was night when they arrived in the city of Mexico, and they rode straight to the home of Nina.

The joy of the sergeant's wife at beholding her mistress once more was great indeed, and she welcomed her with a warmth that touched the heart of poor Gabriella, who quickly told her story, for she knew well she could trust Nina.

"Now tell me of my father," she faltered.

"Oh, senora, your father has the sympathy of all for your unknown fate."

"Some may have suspected the facts, but the world knows not the truth, and your father's statement that you were kidnapped is believed by all your old friends."

"He lives alone in his sorrow, and well I know will be glad to welcome you to his heart again."

"I will go to him, Nina, and confess all."

"If he refuses me his love and home, I can go forth in the world to seek another home."

"If he takes me back to his heart, I will atone by my devotion for my desertion of him, and Wanda shall have a home with me, for if I go not there she will accompany me, she will never leave me."

"But, senora, my home is your home so long as you will dwell beneath its roof, and gladly will Jose say the same."

"No, Nina, I am not penniless by any means; but what is mine, through my husband's death, I will devote to charity, I will live to do good, as an atonement for his sins and mine."

"Now, Nina, I will get you to lend me one of your dresses, and I will seek my father in his home."

"But, oh, Nina! I avenged my poor dead Andrea," and the soft voice of the woman suddenly became stern and ringing in her remembrance of her revenge upon Mad Carl.

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

IN his luxuriously-furnished home sat Senor Garcia, a man whose wealth and position made him respected by all.

His hair had whitened of late, the lines of sorrow about his face had made him appear much older; but he was still strong and in full possession of his faculties.

Only that day he had made a thrilling speech before the Junta, and been enthusiastically applauded for his grand effort.

Courted by many he had come to his home, made desolate by the death of his loved wife some years before, and then by the desertion of his beautiful and idolized daughter.

Of that daughter men did not speak to him.

Whether they deemed her dead or alive, they dared not refer to her in the presence of her father.

The senor had finished his evening meal, and was in his library with dressing-gown and slippers.

A fragrant cigar was between his teeth, and he was lazily watching the smoke castles as they faded away.

At his elbow was a table upon which stood a decanter of rare old Mexican wine and a glass half-full of the amber-hued beverage.

"Senor, a lady craves to see you," said a servant, entering.

Ladies often sought interviews with Senor Garcia, so it was nothing out of the way for one to call now, though the hour was a trifle late.

They came to him for aid, for his influence in helping a brother, husband or father to some position, and the senor never refused to see them, whether he obeyed their will or not.

"It is late, Pedro."

"Yes, senor, but she seemed most urgent," said Pedro, and he recalled with pleasure the fact that the visitor had dropped a gold-piece into his ready palm.

"I will see her, Pedro."

A moment after the servant ushered the visitor into the library.

She came in timidly, wore a heavy vail, and her face was completely concealed, though her form was perfect and graceful.

"Senor Garcia, pardon me for disturbing you at so late an hour, but my business is of importance, and I could only come at night."

The voice was very low, but rich and full in tone, and the Mexican arose and placed a chair for his visitor, while he said:

"Permit me to ask you to have a glass of wine, senorita."

"No, senor," and Senor Garcia was thus foiled in his effort to have the lady raise her vail.

"How can I serve you, senorita?" he asked, as he resumed his seat.

"I am here, senor, to ask if you can tell me aught of your daughter, the Senorita Gabriella, who was kidnapped some two years ago?"

The Mexican started, his face paled, and he said quickly:

"I can tell you nothing of my daughter; but I would give half my fortune to find her."

"Senor Garcia, I am here on an errand by which you can get your wish."

"What! do you know of her, and where she is?" excitedly said the senor.

"It was said that she was kidnapped by the Raiders of the Rio Grande!"

"Yes, it was so said."

"Do you believe this to be true, senor?"

"No, I do not."

"What do you know of your daughter's mysterious disappearance, senor?"

"That is my own secret, and I will not permit a woman to probe into my heart regarding my lost child," was the stern reply.

"Pardon, senor, but said I not that I knew where your daughter was?"

"Ah! and will tell me, so that I can go and fetch her back to her home?" eagerly said the Mexican.

"I come from the camp of the Raiders of the Rio Grande, senor, and they, holding your daughter in their power, would not give her up without a large ransom."

"I am ready and willing to pay their demand."

"But, Senor Garcia, you must first know what you will have to forgive your daughter, as she has confessed all to me."

"And will you tell me of her?"

"I will tell you, senor, that your daughter was a woman to love but once in her lifetime.

"The one whom she gave her heart to proved unworthy of such love, yet it did not change her regard for him.

"She saved his life, when he was under sentence of death, and made him a pledge to go to him and become his wife when he should send for her.

"He did send, and she kept her pledge.

"She went to a hacienda, met Andrea Bonodel and a priest, and was married to him."

"Thank Heaven for that, at least," said the Mexican statesman.

"Then," continued the visitor, "she went with her husband to the home he had prepared for her."

"It was a mountain retreat, and she found that he was known as Don Desperado, the Chief of the Raiders of the Rio Grande."

"My God, I feared it, I felt it!"

"It was true, senor, but as he was Andrea Garcia to her, the senora loved him as devotedly as ever, while he sought to lay by a sum for their support."

"By robbery and murder?"

"Yes, senor."

"And failing, and tiring of his wife, the man has sent you to demand ransom of me for her restoration to me?"

"Would you pay such ransom, senor?"

"I would."

"And receive your daughter to your heart again, senor?"

"I would gladly do so."

"Senor Garcia, I came not from Andrea Bonodel to demand ransom of you, for he never tired of the wife who gave up all for him.

"I came to tell you that Don Desperado, the bandit chief, was dead, slain in his retreat by an American, who was once chief of the band."

"Dead! thank God!"

"Senor!"

"For now my child will come back to me."

"She has come, my father!" was the cry, and as the veil was thrown aside, Senor Garcia beheld Gabriella, his daughter, who had been so long lost to him.

CHAPTER X.

NOT AVENGED.

WHEN the dawn came the camp of the Raiders was early astir.

But no signs of life were visible up at the quarters of Don Desperado.

The peon who was in the habit of cooking the meals of the former chief, and looking after his horses, dared not call the new leader until he learned his wishes in that respect, so he prepared breakfast in the shed near by, and waited.

As the hour came for the men to make their report, the officer next in rank approached the cabin, and knocked.

There was no response, and the door yielded to his touch.

The cabin was empty, and the cot of the chief had not been occupied.

But Don Desperado rarely remained at his headquarters, so a man was sent to the cabin of the senora further up the valley.

He soon came back with blanched face, and reported that the new chief lay dead upon the floor of Senora Gabriella's cabin, and that she and the peon woman were not to be found.

A rush was made by all to the scene, and

there in fact lay the self-appointed chief—but not dead.

He was breathing heavily, his face was distorted and his hands clinched tight.

Search was made for the senora and Wanda, and the chief was taken in hand by one of the two outlaws who had been a surgeon when he lived an honest life.

It was found that he had not been wounded, and it did not take the outlaw surgeon long to discover the real cause.

"He has been poisoned," he said.

"We must save him if we can, but I fear it is doubtful."

"Where is the man he brought as a prisoner to the retreat?"

Men bounded away in search of the prisoner, but he too could not be found.

Drugs to counteract the poison's effect were forced into the mouth of Mad Carl, and while awaiting the result the surgeon looked about the cabin, found the bottle marked "poison," and noted the quantity given him.

"The overdose is what saves him, if saved his life is," said the surgeon.

"The senora did this to avenge her husband, and then made her escape with the prisoner and the peon woman."

"Send men to trail them."

This order was obeyed by the sub-officer, who was as anxious for the new chief to die as the surgeon was to save him.

"If he dies, I will be chief," said the sub-officer.

"If he dies the band will go to ruin, for there is no man here who can command them," was what the outlaw surgeon thought.

At last the poisoned chief began to show signs of recovery.

He breathed less heavily, moved, and his eyes slowly opened.

More medicine was given him, and the surgeon kept the men rubbing constantly, for his limbs seemed to be devoid of life.

The trailers came back at last and reported following the trail of three horses through the secret pass to a certain point, where the tracks of two animals led to the right, those of the other to the left, and toward the Rio Grande.

"The prisoner made his escape into Texas, and the women have remained in Mexico.

"They are all beyond our reach," said the surgeon.

"And the chief?" he was asked, by the sub-officer.

"He will live, Hernando," was the reply, and a smothered curse came from the lips of Hernando.

A moment after the surgeon was called from the side of the chief.

"Well, Hernando?"

"You say that Don Desperado will live?"

"Yes, Hernando, you will not get to be Don Desperado, Number Three, *this time*."

"Ah! you know my wish?"

"Your face reveals it."

"I must be careful; but, Senor Delmar, I will make a bargain with you?"

"Well?"

"You know that I am a successful gambler?"

"Yes."

"I have won much money?"

"So I know to my cost."

"I have laid by every peso."

"So the men say."

"I have also laid by my share of the earnings, and it has been liberal."

"Well?"

"I'll show you where my gold is hidden, Senor Delmar, and I will share it equally with you."

"You are generous, and I accept your kindness, Hernando."

"But you have to earn the gold, senor."

"How?"

"You are a man of medicine, so simply do not allow the chief to recover, for a drug given him now would do it?"

"True, Hernando, but who would be chief?"

"I would."

"It is not that I care for you, Hernando, but you are not fit to be chief."

"Not fit?"

"No, the men would not have confidence in you, the band would go to pieces, and we would all be captured and hanged."

"Well, I will not argue with you, if that is your opinion, Senor Delmar, but if you take what I offer you can leave the band with a handsome fortune."

"It is a temptation, Hernando."

"Then take it."

"No."

"I'll give you two-thirds of my savings?"

"See here, Hernando: one day, some years

ago, I was flying for my life from half a dozen soldiers who were pursuing me.

"They had wounded my horse, and I would have been taken and hanged had not a man seen my danger and come to my rescue."

"I would have been hanged, because I killed the colonel of my regiment, who stole from me the woman I loved."

"I killed him, thus avenging myself, and fled, but, captured, you well can understand my fate."

"That man, single-handed, came to my rescue, and he saved me."

"The man was the American, Don Desperado, now hovering between life and death; but I will save him, Hernando, and all your gold could not tempt me to let him die."

"That is all, Hernando," and re-entering the cabin, the outlaw surgeon beheld his patient sitting up.

CHAPTER XI.

DON DESPERADO'S GRIP.

WHEN the outlaw surgeon beheld the chief sitting up, as he re-entered the cabin after resisting the tempting offer of Hernando, he felt sure of his recovery.

Still it was but an effort of his will-power and great strength, which, exhausted, Mad Carl sunk back again into a state that seemed to bode no recovery.

But Delmar worked hard with his patient, had him removed to the quarters of the former chief, and by nightfall was glad to see that he had sufficiently recovered from the effects of the drug to understand what was said to him.

Sinking into a natural sleep Mad Carl slumbered for hours, awaking just at midnight.

His devoted surgeon was by his side, and had food ready for him, and a cup of strong coffee.

Mad Carl did not speak until he had finished the meal, and then said:

"You are the Senor Delmar, if I remember aright?"

"Yes, senor, who owes his life to you."

"As I do mine to you, for you saved me from dying."

"You had a close call, senor."

"I remember enough to recall that she poisoned me."

"Yes, senor."

"Where is she?"

"She left last night, senor, soon after the deed."

"Last night?"

"Yes, senor."

"Have I been ill so long?"

"It is just sixteen hours since I found you, as I at first believed, dead."

"You have a wonderful constitution to stand such a poison, senor."

"I have been accustomed in my carousals to drink gallons of liquor, and that aided the drug to lose its power, I suppose."

"But the woman?"

"As I said, senor, she departed after her act."

"And her story to me was a lie, and only told to get her revenge!"

"Yes, senor."

"She told me that he forced her to marry him."

"I never saw such a love as hers for that man, senor chief, and she avenged him by taking your life, as she believed."

"Yes, I heard her words as I felt myself growing blind and strengthless."

"I had not the power to move and seemed to be falling, falling, falling!"

"My God! it was horrible, horrible, Senor Delmar!" and Mad Carl shuddered.

"Well, Senor Chief, you escaped death, and a few days will bring you round all right."

"I hope so; but I feel very strange, and—But my prisoner! my prisoner!" he suddenly shouted, half springing to his feet.

"The man you brought here with you, senor?"

"Yes, yes!"

"He was set free by the senora, senor."

"Set free! all my work to do over again!

"Oh! curses upon that woman!

"But I will have my revenge upon her for this act, for Don Desperado yet lives! yet lives to—"

He had sprung to his feet, but reeled and fell heavily, and Delmar quickly called for help, as now he had become like a madman.

It was a terrible struggle for mastery, for Mad Carl was a powerful man, and it took half a dozen outlaws to hold him until Delmar could force some medicine between his teeth that quieted him.

When the morning came Mad Carl was in a raging fever and delirious.

He raved of May Lillie, vowed vengeance upon Pawnee Bill, Daring Dick, and Gabriella Garcia.

For days he hung between life and death, tenderly cared for by the devoted surgeon, who got the best men of the band to aid him.

One night Delmar, utterly worn out with watching, fell asleep on his cot, where he had lain down to rest.

The patient was in a deep sleep, and the turn of the tide had come, for he was on the way to recovery, so Delmar had told Officer Hernando that night.

There was no one in the cabin but the surgeon, for the two assistants had asked leave to get a few hours' rest.

Presently the door gently opened, and a face peered in.

Then the man entered in moccasined feet, and revealed the face and form of Officer Hernando.

He glanced at the form of the surgeon on the cot, and listened to his deep breathing.

"He is so worn out he will not awaken," he muttered, and he crossed the room to the cot where Don Desperado lay.

He was sleeping as quietly as an infant.

From his pocket Hernando took a paper, emptied the contents into a cup on a stand, and from a stone jar poured some water upon the powder.

He stirred it with his finger, and then stepped to the cot and bent over the prostrate form of the outlaw chief.

He pressed the cup to his lips, to force the contents down his throat, when suddenly the arms of Don Desperado flew upward, and Officer Hernando was seized in a grip he could not shake off, while from the lips of the chief came the words in a hiss:

"Trying to poison me, are you?"

In an instant Delmar was upon his feet, and only when his revolver covered the intended poisoner, did Mad Carl release his hold and drop back utterly exhausted, for his strength in his weakened condition after weeks of illness, was but temporary, born of the moment of peril.

"Hands up, Hernando, for I will kill you if you resist."

"So this is your game is it, to get to be chief?" and Delmar placed a whistle to his lips and called for help.

"My God, Delmar, the men will kill me," cried the now terrified outlaw officer.

"No, they shall not kill you, for I will do that when I am able to rise from this bed."

The words were in a low, faint voice; but the traitor heard them and knew that Don Desperado made no idle threat.

The men came and were told to place Officer Hernando in irons.

"But, Senor Delmar, you can give no such order," said one.

"I give it then," came from the chief.

And he added:

"If he escapes, his guards shall die."

So Hernando was led away, and exhausted by his effort, Don Desperado sank to sleep while his faithful nurse, with slumber driven from his eyelids now stood watch and ward over him, and outlaw it is true, but faithful as death to the man who had saved his life in the past.

CHAPTER XII.

A SHOT FOR A SHOT.

WHEN Don Desperado, as I will now speak of Mad Carl the Cowboy, awoke the morning after the attempt upon his life by Officer Hernando, he was in the full possession of his senses, and spoke in a fairly strong voice to the outlaw surgeon.

"Senor Delmar, I owe you my life, for I have been partly conscious of all you have done for me."

"Do not speak of it, Senor Chief."

"But I must, and will."

"How long have I been ill?"

"It is just one month to-day, senor, since you came to the retreat."

"So long?"

"I can hardly realize it; but I will get well now!"

"Yes, senor, I look for no relapse now."

"You must help all you can to get well, and in a couple of weeks more you will be yourself again."

"You have been my devoted friend, Delmar, the only friend I have on earth."

"The men regard you most kindly, senor."

"Bah! they care for me only so far as I can serve them; but you are my friend."

"Now tell me, where is Hernando?"

"In the guard-house in irons, senor."

"I saw you drop down on the cot to rest, I saw him enter, and he took from his pocket a powder and he placed it in a cup."

"Then he poured water upon it and I saw his face as he came near me."

"It was like my face in my moments of madness, Delmar, the face of a fiend."

"He tried to force the poison between my lips and with a great effort I saved myself."

"Had he tried to kill me a day sooner he would have been successful."

"When I am able to get out I will see if my hand has forgotten its cunning with a revolver at ten paces, and he shall be my target, Delmar."

"Yes, senor."

"Have you the cup he had?"

"It is there, senor."

"Is it poison?"

"Yes, senor, enough to kill a dozen men."

"The men must know this."

"I told them of it an hour ago, senor, and it was hard to keep them from hanging Hernando."

"It is well that they did not deprive me of my revenge."

"I told them not to do so, senor."

"He wanted to be chief."

"Yes, senor, and as he has been found out by you, I will now tell you what I had not intended doing, I cared not to betray a comrade," and Delmar told of the offer of Hernando to him if he would allow Don Desperado to die.

The chief smiled, but it was a smile that would have sent terror into the heart of Hernando, the traitor officer, had he seen it.

The days passed on and Don Desperado was able to sit up, and partake of his food with a relish.

The band had remained close in camp, not daring to make any venture without the command of the chief, and all were glad to see him becoming himself again.

In the guard-house was Hernando, a picture of misery.

He had offered all he was worth to his guards singly, to allow him to escape, to go with him; but there were too many legends among the old members of the band about Don Desperado as chief, to allow the men to take any chances.

The threat to make the lives of the guards the forfeit of Hernando's escape had effectually alarmed them.

One afternoon Don Desperado sat out upon the rustic piazza in front of his quarters.

He was regaining strength rapidly, though still pale, thin and haggard.

Presently he called to the outlaw surgeon, who approached him.

"Delmar?"

"Yes, senor."

"There will be a vacancy in the place of the office next to me, and I intend to appoint you to the position, while I will also keep you as surgeon, so that you will draw double pay."

"You are most kind, Senor Chief."

"No, I am just, and doing double work you will get double pay."

"But to what place do you refer, senor?"

"To Hernando's."

"Send him here, and order the men here to witness the death of a traitor."

The outlaw surgeon quietly obeyed, for he saw that in the face of Don Desperado which told him he had determined to act.

The men were called to headquarters by the bugle, and then came Hernando walking between his two guards.

He was very pale and nervous.

The guards halted before the chief, and gazing at Hernando, he said:

"I sent for you, Senor Hernando, to kill you."

"I sent for the men to witness your execution."

"Guards, place the doomed man just ten paces away, and, men, form in two lines on each side of me."

The order was obeyed in silence.

"Now, Hernando, you have but a few minutes to live."

"Senor Delmar, tell the men what this man tried to bribe you to do."

The outlaw surgeon obeyed, and there were savage glances cast at the doomed man.

"Now, Delmar, hand me one of my revolvers from my belt."

The outlaw surgeon obeyed the order, while Hernando shouted out:

"My God, chief! do you intend to kill me?"

"I do, if my hand has not lost its cunning during my long illness," was the serene reply.

"Men, will you stand by and see me murdered?" cried the doomed man.

But the men made no move, uttered no word against the intention of their chief.

"See here, Hernando, I do not wish to have it said I murdered any man, and a reckless look came into the eyes of the desperado chief, as he added:

"So I will give you a chance for you life."

"Oh, name it, captain!"

"If I miss you, then shall you have a shot at me," was the calm rejoinder of Don Desperado.

CHAPTER XIII.

VOWS OF VENGEANCE.

At the reckless proposition of Don Desperado the eyes of Hernando sparkled with pleasure.

All knew that he was a dead shot, a man who never missed his aim.

Was not Don Desperado foolish then to give him a chance, if he missed, to kill him?

It was known that Don Desperado had been a sure shot, yet here he was, just up from a long illness, weak and naturally unnerved, and he would be something more than human, it seemed, if he could hold a steady hand under such circumstances.

But his was a desperate nature, and he was the man to take desperate chances.

"If you miss me, Senor Chief, you are to give me a shot?" said Hernando, eagerly.

"That is what I said."

"I am agreed, senor."

"I will say more, that if I fail to kill you, then you shall have a shot at me."

"Ah, senor, you are a good shot, I know, but you are trusting too much in a nerve that illness has weakened," said Delmar.

"I have said it, Delmar, and I shall be as good as my word."

"Now, Hernando, take your position."

The man's hopes had risen.

He had no idea that even Don Desperado could command his nerve as he expected to do, and kill him.

"No, he trembles with weakness even now and will miss me."

"Then comes my turn, his death follows my shot and I am chief," said the traitor officer, with a malignant smile of anticipated hope and revenge combined.

He took his stand with almost a defiant air, and unbuttoned his coat, while he said with a sneer:

"My heart lies just here, Senor Chief."

"I will not aim at what you have not got, Hernando, but send my bullet in search of any brains you may possess," was the sinister response, and the man paled as he met the eyes of the bandit chief.

But Hernando stood firm, while a deathlike silence fell upon the nearly two-score men.

As for Delmar, he looked anxious, and, in fact, the men wore a look of anxiety also.

Don Desperado examined the revolver very critically, appeared satisfied with the result, and then bent his eye upon the distance between Hernando and himself, and glanced up at the sunlight.

Still seated in his chair Don Desperado suddenly leveled his revolver at the traitor officer, who stood firmly facing him.

With the crack of the revolver Hernando dropped dead, the bullet having struck just between the eyes.

A wild yell went up from the crowd at the deadly shot, and they crowded around to congratulate him upon the fact that his long illness had not weakened his nerve.

"I thank you, my men, and I wish now to say to you that the Senor Delmar is the ranking officer after me, stepping into that traitor's shoes."

"Delmar, I feel tired, so will rest."

With this Don Desperado arose, and, supported by the outlaw surgeon, entered his cabin to seek rest.

The next day he appeared better and stronger, and in another week declared himself well and able to take the saddle.

"I shall take a few men, Delmar, and go upon a reconnoissance toward the City of Mexico," he announced.

"Toward the City of Mexico, chief?" repeated Delmar in amazement.

"Yes, for I am not known in that direction, and shall hide my men at some convenient place, while I find the lovely wife of the late chief of this band."

"I have, while lying awake at night, longing to recover, registered several vows, Delmar. The first is to seek revenge, and to do so I must discover a way to hurt her heart the most."

"Of course the peon woman who aided her falls also under my vengeance."

"They have gone to the City of Mexico, I am

sure, from all you have told me, and I must find them.

"Then I have others who must feel the weight of my hatred, Delmar."

"One is a Captain of Indian scouts, in the United States Army—he who was my prisoner, and who is known as Pawnee Bill."

"He shall again become my prisoner."

"Another, Delmar, is his wife, May Lillie, the Lariat Queen of Texas, and upon her my hatred shall mercilessly fall."

"Then, Senor Delmar, comes a boy, yet more than a boy, who dogged my trail and would kill me if he got the chance."

"The boy's father, comes next; then Buckskin Charlie, the Captain of the Cowboy Rangers; and his men also."

"Ah! I have a goodly list, Senor Delmar, and I have registered my vows of vengeance against them all."

"I shall strike quickly and mercilessly, and the men shall be loaded with booty if they follow my lead."

"I shall carry my war of hatred from Mexico into Texas, and I shall strike when I can and bitter will be the blow."

"Two beautiful women, a peon woman, a boy, Pawnee Bill, Buckskin Charlie and a score of my old cowboy comrades are to feel my fury, are to suffer at my hands."

"It is a long list, Senor Delmar, but the red work has got to be done, and I will not rest until it is finished."

"You will not surely kill the women, Senor Chief?" urged Delmar, who had listened with almost horror to the words of Don Desperado.

"Kill the women!"

"Yes, señor."

"No, I shall hurt them through those they love, and when their hearts have stood all that hearts can stand through the sufferings of their loved ones, I will be content and let them go their way, for my revenge will have been finished," and the look upon the face of Don Desperado fairly made Delmar, the outlaw surgeon, shudder with horror, for he read there that the man meant to do all he threatened—that, if in his power, he would fully carry out his terrible vows of vengeance.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LETTER.

AFTER his escape from the retreat of the Raiders of the Rio Grande, having parted with his wife and the Cowboy Rangers at the pass, Captain Gordon Lillie pressed on as rapidly as he felt his horse could stand it, to rejoin his command.

He was several days beyond his leave, by his capture, and though not to blame was anxious to place before the general the reason for his delay. Without adventure he at last reached the fort, where the general had his headquarters, and at once made his report.

The general listened with the deepest interest, and said:

"I have heard often of this Mad Carl the Cowboy from officers stationed on the Rio Grande, and have had a mind to send you and your Pawnees there to capture him; but now that he has been killed, as you report, I hope there will be no more trouble."

"You had a narrow escape of it, Lillie, and I congratulate you, while I am not surprised that each time you were made a prisoner under the circumstances."

"I now await your orders, general, as I am ready to return to my Pawnees."

"Well, let me say to you that the commanding general has been so much pleased with the services you have rendered with your Pawnee police, or Indian cavalry, as I call them, that he has decided to allow you to increase your force from your present company of sixty warriors, to three companies, numbering, all told, two hundred braves."

"Each company is to be under a chief whom you may designate captain, and to have a couple of lieutenants as well, with non-commissioned officers."

"You have shown, Mr. Lillie, that you can make good soldiers of Indians, and the experiment is to go further, so I wish you to go to your Pawnees and pick your red-skin troopers."

"Although, as you know, you hold only an honorary commission as captain, you shall be promoted to the honorary rank of major, our commissioned officers taking rank over you, of course, when you are thrown together, but yielding where your judgment is called for."

"Now, Major Lillie, I wish you to organize your battalion with all dispatch, and report to me when it is ready for service in the field."

With many thanks to the general for his kind-

ness to him, Pawnee Bill at once set out for the important mission he had to perform.

He went first to his Indian cavalry camp and made known to them what the general's wish was.

With two chiefs to accompany him, he then went to the village of the tribe, and as the white chief of the Pawnees, called a council in the Grand Medicine Lodge.

Ever the friends of the pale-faces, the old warriors listened with pleasure to the plan to make soldiers of their young men, and the very best material in the tribe was selected to join the companies of red-skin cavalry.

Then, with his volunteers, Pawnee Bill returned to his old company and began the work of arming and drilling his red soldiers in such a way that they would understand all orders, and maneuver as he wished them.

Satisfied with his command, and the work accomplished, he reported to the general, and was complimented upon what he had done.

"Now, Major Lillie," said the general, "I was just about to dispatch a courier to your camp, for a man arrived half an hour ago with a letter for you."

"It is marked important, and the bearer says that he comes from the ranch where your wife is, and, I am sorry to say, states that she is ill."

"Here is the letter, and I hope that it will be nothing serious."

Gordon Lillie quickly broke the seal and read aloud:

"PARADISE RANCH,
"Sept. 10th, 18—."

"MY DEAR LILLIE:

"I regret to write you that your wife was thrown from her horse a week ago and seriously injured."

"I sent to B—— for a physician, and he said that as she longs to have you come to her, it was best that you should do so, and I hasten a man off with this letter to you, urging that you come without delay."

"Hoping to see you soon, I am

"Your friend,

"SAMUEL VAIL."

The face of Pawnee Bill turned pale as he read this letter, and yet before he could speak, the general said:

"You are at liberty to start at once, Major Lillie, and I will send Captain Taylor, who speaks the Pawnee language well, to continue the drill of your Indian cavalry during your absence."

"You are very kind, general, and I will depart at once."

"Yes, and your leave is indefinite, of course, as long as your wife is in danger, though I hope you will find her not so bad as the letter implies."

"The extra drill in camp will do your Pawnees good, and you can take them on a scout upon your return."

"And, by the way, I will send a chief and your old company after you in about ten days, as I wish you to make a dash over on the Rio Grande with them, returning through the Territory."

"Where would you have them join you?"

"At the Red Canyon Pass, sir, they can camp, sending me word to Paradise Ranch of their arrival."

"Again I thank you, general, and will be on the road at once, the courier of course returning with me."

With another hope that he would find his wife out of danger, the kind-hearted general bade Pawnee Bill good-by, and going out into the fort, he looked up the man who had brought the letter.

He found a rough-looking borderman, wearing a Texas star upon his hat, and said:

"It was you that brought the letter for me, my man?"

"Be you Pawnee Bill?"

"I am."

"Then you are the man."

"When did you leave Paradise Ranch?"

"Jist three days ago, cap'n."

"You have ridden well, and I will see that you have a fresh horse to return with me."

"Them was my orders from the cap'n, that I were to find yer and then return with yer."

"I am a hard rider, and I fear it will try you to return at once; but we can start together."

"I'll git thar, pard, when you does, ef yer gives me a fresh horse, for my animile is dead beat."

"Are you one of the captain's men?"

"I be, pard, one o' ther new cowboys that come with ther El Paso herd o' cattle he bought jist arter you were thar."

"All right, I shall be ready to start in half an hour, so get your dinner."

"I'll be on hand, cap'n," was the answer.

"What is your name, my friend?"

"Lariat Joe, cap'n, is what my pards calls me."

"All right, Lariat Joe, I won't forget your kindness, I assure you, in what you have done for me."

"I guesses yer won't," was the muttered response of the man as he turned away, a strange look upon his face.

Half an hour after he rode away from the fort with Pawnee Bill.

CHAPTER XV.

TREACHERY.

The man who called himself Lariat Joe did not impress Pawnee Bill favorably, the more he saw of him.

He had a hang-dog, wicked look, was uncouth in his appearance, and looked more like a beggar on horseback than a Texas cowboy.

If he had received any wages of late, he certainly had not squandered any money upon his outfit.

But his weapons were in good condition, and he had the look of a man who would use them at short notice.

He seemed to feel that it was his duty to entertain Pawnee Bill, and he set about it in a way that caused the young man to soon call him to a halt.

Pawnee Bill got tired of the man's careless chatter, and said, though not unkindly:

"I say, my friend, I wish to think over the bad news you have brought me, so I beg you will not talk so much."

"I kin hold up if yer wishes, but I knowed yer must feel bad, and I were a-tryin' ter cheer yer up."

"I thank you, but nothing would cheer me now while I am in such distress about my dear little wife."

"That's nat'r'al, fer ef a man loves a woman he don't wish ter hav no harm befall 'em, and it be ther same way with the gals, ef they keers fer a feller; but ef they don't love him, then they w'u'd sooner hev him out o' ther way."

And instead of "holding up," Lariat Joe talked on in the same strain until night came on and they went into camp.

It was only when Lariat Joe went to sleep that Pawnee Bill's ears got a rest, and then the man snored loudly.

Before dawn they were on their way again, and Pawnee Bill pushed the horses as hard as he dared do, with the long trail ahead of them.

At last they came near the Red Canyon Pass, and Pawnee Bill recalled to mind how cleverly Mad Carl had deceived him and made him a prisoner in the valley.

"It was just here that Mad Carl captured me," he said, and of course Lariat Joe had heard of the affair from the cowboys, and had much to say upon the subject.

"And over in yonder pass is where he lassoed me the first time, so I do not recall this vicinity with any great amount of delight, Lariat Joe."

"Waal I should think not, Pard Cap'n, and I doesn't blame yer a bit; but thar hain't no danger on this trail now, since Mad Carl the Cowboy were killed."

"He deserved the fate he met with, Lariat Joe, if ever a man did; but have you heard anything of the Raiders of the Rio Grande of late?"

"I has heerd they has been cuttin' up o' late."

"Then they must have a new chief!"

"I guesses so, for thar be allus a man ready ter step inter another man's shoes, no matter how big a pilgrim thar dead galoot may hev been; but, this are the Red Canyon Pass yer spoke of?"

"Yes."

"It be a lonesome place, pard, and it are the last place I'd like ter meet any foe, fer they c'u'd ambush yer here and yer'd hev no chance on 'arth, pard."

"You are right, Lariat Joe."

And as the words were spoken there rung out, loud and threatening:

"Hands up, Pawnee Bill, for you are trapped!"

Pawnee reined his horse back so suddenly and sharply that he threw him upon his haunches, and seemed about to meditate a dash for life when Lariat Joe grasped his rein and cried:

"Don't be a fool, Pawnee Bill, for Don Desperado has yer covered, and hemmed in behind and before in thar canyon, as I knows!"

"Ha! you are the traitor then? Take that!"

The revolver of Pawnee Bill flashed and Lariat Joe dropped from his horse, a dead man.

Instantly Pawnee Bill spurred forward to behold a dozen rifles covering him as they peered from the shelter of the rocks.

He also caught sight of lariats stretched across the canyon trail before him.

He wheeled his horse quickly to behold rifle muzzles over the rocks on the trail he had come, while half a dozen horsemen had ridden in behind him, so that all escape was cut off.

A mocking laugh greeted Pawnee Bill, as he came to a halt and stood at bay, a revolver in each hand, ready to die there and then if need be.

Then again the mocking laugh, followed by the words:

"You have killed my man Lariat Joe, Pawnee Bill, but I have thirty men hemming you in, so do not be a fool and force me to kill you."

"What do you wish with me?"

"To take you prisoner."

"Who are you?"

"Do you surrender?"

"I can see no other course to pursue, for it is plain that the odds are dead against me."

"They are, and you are wise. Hand over your weapons to a man whom I will send for them."

"I can do nothing else," was the reply.

Pawnee Bill knew that it was instant death to make the slightest break.

To surrender then he would at least have the hope of escape.

That Lariat Joe had meant what he said, that Don Desperado was the man who had entrapped him, he did not believe, for he had seen the Mad Cowboy drop dead, as he believed, from his chair in the cabin of Senora Gabriella.

Still that he had fallen into the hands of the Raiders of the Rio Grande he could readily believe.

"Send your man, and I will surrender," he said.

A man advanced, and, as he left the shelter of the rocks, Pawnee Bill saw that he was a Mexican.

He handed over his rifle, sword and belt of arms, and said:

"I see that you are the Raiders of the Rio Grande."

"Yes, Pawnee Bill, and I am your sworn enemy, Don Desperado," said a voice, and to the utter amazement of the prisoner the Mad Cowboy, whom he had surely believed to be dead, stepped from behind a rock and confronted him!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THIRD TIME.

THAT Gordon Lillie was completely nonplussed at beholding before him the man he believed to be dead goes without saying.

The Mad Cowboy seemed indeed to possess the tenacity of a cat in clinging to life.

But there was no mistaking the man, there were no more like him.

It was the Mad Cowboy, Carl Grafton, and no other, he known now as Don Desperado or any other name he pleased.

"So you are not dead," said Pawnee Bill, with the utmost coolness, taking a look in the face of the man, and speaking as though not in the least surprised.

"No; the poison you put in my cup failed to do its work; as I had been such a hard drinker it lost its effects."

"The poison I put in your cup?" said Pawnee Bill indignantly.

"So I said."

The young man was in a quandary.

He wished to fling back the charge that he would poison a man to get rid of him; but he did not know but what the woman had not been able to escape, and believing him out of harm's way, had said he did it.

So to protect her he replied:

"Well, poison, steel or lead, you are a hard man to kill, Don Desperado, for I suppose you are pleased to be called by that name now?"

"Yes, I am Don Desperado."

"But how did you escape?"

"Did not the wife of your predecessor explain?"

"She escaped also."

Thinking this might be a plan to entrap him into some admission Pawnee Bill merely replied:

"I am glad she did."

"Well, we will not stay here to bandy words, for I am in dangerous territory I know."

"I sent one of my band, a Texan, to entrap you, and I have done so."

The face of the young scout flushed with pleasure, as he said:

"Thank Heaven my wife is not injured then."

"Who said so?" and the outlaw scowled as he saw his mistake, for if his prisoner had continued to believe that his wife was lying at the point of death he would have suffered that much more keenly and that was just what Don Des-

perado wished, to make him feel all that he could of misery.

"I mean that my man captured the messenger that Captain Vail sent you."

Pawnee Bill laughed, and replied:

"One should not speak ill of the dead, Don, but that fellow lying there had not the sense or pluck to capture one of Buckskin Charlie's Cowboy Rangers.

"Now had you been the bearer of that letter it would have been different, for I admit your cleverness, as this is the third time you have most cleverly captured me; but that other cut-throat, no, not he."

Don Desperado was angry at the slip he had made so said:

"Then you do not believe that your wife was thrown from her horse and badly hurt?"

"See here, Don, you are only getting into deeper water, for the letter came to me sealed, and so how did you know its contents?"

"Oh, no, you wrote the letter, for I have heard that you were clever with your pen and could imitate any handwriting."

"My wife is all right, Don, and will be hot on your trail, mark my words if she is not."

Don Desperado had overreached himself, and with an oath said:

"Well, Pawnee Bill, I have you safe, and shall take you to my den."

"Then I shall make a raid into Texas and oe be unto the dwellers at Paradise Ranch, for I shall hit them hard."

"I live now only for revenge, Pawnee Bill."

"Yes, and you'll die for it some day; but as I cannot help myself I must endure what you put upon me."

"You take it coolly."

"Oh, yes, for it's a long lane that has no turn in it, Don," and Pawnee Bill smiled as sweetly as though he had not the slightest care in the world.

"Well, you come back to your old irons," was the savage response of the outlaw chief, and he called to one of his men to bring the manacles.

They were brought, the handcuffs, and anklets with a chain, and the scout was thus secured in his saddle, for the manacles about the wrists were made fast to the horn of his saddle.

The party then filed out of the canyon and went into camp over on a range not far away from the trail, leaving the body of the dead man, he who had faithfully performed his duty at least, be it what it might, lying where he had fallen under Pawnee Bill's shot.

With the score of men with him Don Desperado did not care to be discovered in Texas territory.

He had come for one purpose, the capture of Pawnee Bill, and having sent Lariat Joe upon his mission, he went to meet him upon his return with his victim.

He had copied the writing of Captain Vail perfectly, and knew that such a call as he sent would bring Pawnee Bill with all speed to see his wife.

So it was that the night before Lariat Joe was expected back he had crossed into Texas with twenty of his men and sought a hiding-place a few miles from the Red Canyon Pass.

The next day, so great had been the pace which Pawnee Bill had kept up on his way to Paradise Ranch, the two had come along, and there was Don Desperado and his men guarding the pass.

That any man would have been captured under such circumstances can be well understood.

So over to his camp went Don Desperado with his prisoner, and there remained until nightfall, when at a rapid pace the party started for the Rio Grande.

They did not spare their horses, they had recovered their game, and before dawn Don Desperado was safely across the Rio Grande and climbing the trail to his den in the mountains.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "LITTLE WONDER" ON THE ALERT.

DARING DICK was a born border boy.

He had "fought Indians," mounted behind his father on horseback, when he was but seven years of age, and he had been reared to understand all there was in wood and prairie-craft.

Mad Carl the Cowboy had been his teacher in many things, for he had been greatly attached to the bright and daring boy, and an apt pupil he had found him to be.

Then, too, he had the benefit of the teaching of every cowboy in the band on his father's ranch.

His mother and father had endeavored to

teach him his studies, but Dick preferred a pistol to a pen any day, following a trail to doing an example in arithmetic.

He wished to make history rather than study it.

Then came May Lillie to Paradise Ranch as governess, and to the surprise and delight of his parents, Dick was interested in his studies.

He found in the young governess one who could ride and shoot as well as he could, and could throw a lariat with the best man in the Cowboy Rangers.

She could follow a trail at a gallop, and knew no more what fear was than did a grizzly bear of the Rocky Mountains.

So it was that she showed Dick in her firm, but sweet way, that there was much for him to learn outside of prairie-craft and Indian-fighting.

She interested him in history, geography, and his other studies, and the two became, as Dick expressed it, "like boy pals together."

May had their hours for study, and they were seldom broken in upon.

Then came play and recreation, and so it was that she had tamed the wild youngster without his discovering the fact.

But his parents noted it and rejoiced that it was so.

The behavior of Mad Carl, the coming of Gordon Lillie and his capture and rescue had broken in considerably upon the studies of late; but then, the governess said that when October came they would all get down to work again, so that Dick must enjoy himself as best he could meanwhile.

Not a thought entered the minds of any of them that Mad Carl was yet alive, and so no shadow fell upon Paradise Ranch.

The Comanches had made no late hostile movements, and there seemed to be no dread of Mexican Raiders since the death of the two Don Desperados.

Captain Vail was continually buying cattle, and thus adding to his enormous herd, and his band of cowboys was increased accordingly, and were divided into three camps, so as to surround the grazing grounds, while Buckskin Charlie was captain of the gallant Rangers.

To visit the three camps each day was Dick's delight, and he always took home with him a lot of game for the table.

One afternoon, some two months after the departure of Pawnee Bill for his command, Dick extended his ride far beyond the camp of cowboys situated toward the Red Canyon. He rode on, looking for game, and beholding a deer upon a distant hill dismounted and crept up to get a shot.

He reached the biltop, expecting to find the deer grazing over the ridge, within easy range, and was prepared to fire, when, instead of the game he was after, he saw that which made him spring back out of sight.

Then he cautiously approached the ridge again, at a point where there were some bushes, and peered over.

What he saw was a number of horsemen in camp. They were in a valley, their horses picketed near, and they were gathered in groups about.

Dick always carried a field-glass with him, one which his father had given him a year before.

The focus was fixed at once and the glass turned upon the group of men.

"Mexicans!" muttered the boy, recognizing at a glance that they were neither Texans nor Indians.

Then he looked again and said:

"They are Mexicans, and I'll bet my rifle against a spur that they are the Raiders of the Rio Grande. They came here last night, and are waiting until to-night to make a raid, and our ranch is to be the first one they hit; but, maybe I am wrong, for there are only a dozen in sight—too small a force to tackle our Ranger Cowboys.

"I reckon they know of a wagon-train coming, and are here to head it off."

"Yes, they are near the Red Canyon, through which it must pass, and doubtless have a sentinel there on the watch to call them."

"Now if I could only head that train off! But, which way is it coming, I wonder? That's the trouble, for I don't know; but I must do something."

"It will be dark in half an hour, and it will take me three hours to ride to the cowboy camp, and all of four more before we could get back here, and still longer if we waited to send for the boys from the other camps. Let me take another squint at those fellows."

He raised the glass to his eyes again and took a long survey in silence.

"Well, they seem cool enough about it in their waiting. I counted just seventeen, and there must be more of them. I guess I'll have to strike for home and tell the boys what I have seen—ah! there are two more of them," and again the glass went to his eyes as he saw two men come into view from beyond the camp.

One glance and Dick dropped the glass.

"Oh, Lordy! Mad Carl is not dead, for there he is! He has captured Pawnee Bill again!" cried Dick. "Now for a ride for life, for he must be saved!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

To be certain that there was no mistake, Daring Dick had adjusted the focus of his glass again, and once more turned it upon Don Desperado.

"No, that is Mad Carl, and not his ghost," he said.

Then he deliberately surveyed the man standing by his side.

"It is Captain Gordon Lillie, and no mistake."

"What does it mean?"

But it struck him suddenly that he could not solve the mystery by questioning himself, so he decided at once upon the ride for life, as he had expressed it.

Taking a last glance at the group he saw that the men were going toward their horses, and this meant a move of some kind.

Two horses were led up by a Mexican to where Mad Carl and his prisoner stood, and the latter was aided to his saddle, and Dick saw that he was ironed heavily, and then made fast to his saddle.

Then Mad Carl mounted his horse, and in the gathering twilight rode toward the timber in their rear.

Dick waited no longer, and went bounding down the hill his rifle in hand.

His rapid approach toward his horse caused the animal, which was a skittish beast, to throw himself back suddenly, snap the bridle-rein and go flying for home at a run.

Dick's face expressed all he felt, but he did not give utterance to his feelings, as many a man might have done in profanity.

He stood an instant gazing after the horse, while into his eyes came tears.

No pain or distress to himself could have brought those tears to the eyes of the brave boy, but when he knew how much depended upon him, upon time, he could not check their flow.

But impatiently he dashed them away as unmanly, and said:

"I've just got to hoof it, that's all, and I guess I'll see the sun rise before I see Paradise."

"Now that's like poetry isn't it?"

Without waiting to answer his own question as to the merit of his rhyme he shouldered his rifle and started off on foot for Paradise Ranch, or rather the cowboys' camp several miles this side of it.

Still it was a walk of over thirty miles the nearest way he could make it.

Then too he had his belt of arms and rifle as weights to carry, so that the boy had a giant undertaking before him through the darkness of the night.

That he would once falter Dick never took into consideration, though he did mutter to himself:

"I wish the horse would run all the way home, and then they'd send after me, if they knew which way to send, for the trail could not be followed until morning."

"Oh my! but isn't it dark?"

"I wouldn't mind it if I was mounted."

"I guess I'm getting like a Comanche, only brave on horseback, and ready to run when I am on foot— Ah! I thought so."

"It's just about time for those fellows to tune up," and Dick referred to the yelp of a coyote heard off on the prairie.

But the boy trudged on at a slow pace.

He did not do a great deal of walking, for riding was his strong point, and he did not wish to tire himself out by going rapidly.

The coyote he had heard "tuning up" as he expressed it, soon had another to make it a duet, and next a trio were heard, followed by a quartette, which in turn ended in a general howl.

"Lordy! they are singing a chorus now!"

"Well, I'll change the tune if they crowd the mourner," and with a reckless laugh Dick went on his way, grasping his rifle more firmly.

The coyotes seemed to appreciate his situation, that he was alone, afoot and not happy, for they came snarling and yelping behind him.

As they pressed too close Dick would glance over his shoulder and mark their position.

Then he walked on whistling, to show the animals how indifferent he was to them.

Suddenly he stopped whistling, with the remark:

"I'm whistling a lie, for I am scared, and no mistake, so I'll chip in a shot!" and with this Dick turned sharply and sent a couple of shots into the pack, now crowding close upon his heels.

A wild howling followed, with two sharp yelps, and the pack scattered.

"They haven't got much sand, after all; but I don't want their company, anyhow. I'd rather be alone," and Daring Dick resumed his walk, reloading his rifle as he went along.

Thus an hour passed and still he pressed on.

The wolves were again at his heels, but he did not mind them until they became too bold, when he emptied a revolver into their ranks, and it was an hour before they again beset him.

Noting the stars Dick saw that it was after midnight, and he said:

"Well, I am almost half-way to the camp, anyhow. If I saw my own horse ahead now, I think I'd mistake him for a buffalo and give him a shot out of spite."

"What! crowding me again, are you? Well, I must give you an arithmetic lesson, as Miss May says—six from a crowd leaves less," and the revolver flashed six times and dropped bullets among the coyotes thick and fast.

Again the pack scattered and again Dick moved on.

His haversack of provisions was hung to his saddle, so he had nothing to eat, and muttered:

"I'll broil a piece of wolf if I keep on getting hungry. I've heard the cowboys say they have had to eat wolf meat, but I prefer cake and pie, only I haven't got the pie or the cake."

"Lordy! but I'm tired and hungry, but it won't do to rest, or I'd have that congregation of wolves thinking I was going to turn up my toes and they were invited to the funeral. This night is the longest one I ever knew."

But the brave boy held on at his slow but steady pace, and the hours went by on leaden wings to him.

At last he saw a glimmer of gray in the east, and away scampered the wolves as the dawn came.

Then the horizon grew rosy with the rising of the sun, and afar off Dick saw the clump of timber on the river in which was the camp of the cowboys. He gave a shout of delight, for the night was gone, help was at hand, and soon the gallant Rangers would be once more upon the trail of Carl the Madman!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ALARM.

WITH help at hand Daring Dick, pale, haggard, staggering from fatigue, set out at a trot to reach the camps as soon as possible.

The cowboys were having their breakfast, as the blue smoke was curling up above the tree-tops. Here and there he saw a herder on duty, while the cattle were scattered over the field; but he himself was not seen and he tried to call, but his voice was not loud enough to reach the men he saw.

So he took out his revolver and fired several shots in rapid succession.

Instantly he saw the effect. The cattle raised their heads, the herders in view instantly were on the alert, and out of the timber came cowboy after cowboy ready for whatever was upon them.

They spied the boy and came toward him with a rush.

He had given out now and had sunk down upon the prairie as they came near.

Buckskin Charlie was the first one to reach him and he sprung to his side.

"My poor Dick! what is the matter?"

"Don Desperado! the Mad Cowboy!" was all that Dick could say and he swooned away.

The night had been too much for even his iron nerves and strength.

Tenderly Buckskin Charlie raised him in his arms and bore him on his horse to his cabin.

Then the cowboy's panacea for all ills, a glass of whisky, was given him, and the swallow of liquor revived him.

At last he sat up and said:

"Ah! I'm as good as new now, Charlie, but I can't talk until I get something to eat."

All laughed at this, for they had been alarmed about Dick's condition, and Larry said:

"Just see what good whisky will do, pard."

Breakfast was just ready, and Dick was given a cup of coffee, a venison steak and some hoe-

cake, and he ate with a relish that showed he was indeed hungry.

"Now, pard, I'll tell you what's wrong," he said.

All had gathered anxiously around him, for his coming back on foot, haggard, pale and used up told them that Dick had seen that which they should know.

"You spoke of Mad Carl, Dick."

"Yes, Charlie; he's not dead."

"Why Dick!"

"It's true, for I have seen him."

"His ghost, maybe."

"No, Mad Carl, for I know him, and can tell a man from a ghost, can't I?"

All admitted that he was acquainted with Mad Carl and should be able to tell a man from a ghost, so Dick said:

"I went on a run after a deer, and looking over the ridge to get a shot, saw a camp of horsemen."

"They were the Raiders of the Rio Grande."

"Where was this, Dick?"

"Within two miles of the Red Canyon Pass."

"When?"

"Last evening, just before dark."

"Whew!"

All the cowboys locked at each other and then at Dick.

"Tell us more, Dick," said Buckskin Charlie.

"Well, I counted seventeen of them, and concluded they were not on a raid our way, but lying in wait for a train, but to come which way I did not know.

"Then I saw two more come into sight, and my glass told me who they were."

"Who were they?"

"One was Mad Carl."

"Sure?"

"Yes, Charlie, it was, for I saw him distinctly."

"And the other?"

"Was Pawnee Bill."

The cowboys gave another whistle to express their surprise.

For the first time Dick saw that he was doubted, and he said with some show of anger:

"See here, I am in my right senses, and I know what I saw."

"I am tired out, used up, and that tanglefoot whisky you poured into my mouth has gone to my head; yes, and heels, too, but I know what I am saying, and I'll tell you all about it," and then he told the whole story, and how his horse had gotten away from him and run home, and he had "hoofed it" to their camp.

"Now I'll rest here, Charlie, for I go back on the trail with you, and you go and tell father, while you send to the other camps for men to meet you here, and you had better get boys enough to make a good show."

"If I was in your place, I would not distress Miss May by telling her the truth, or the folks at home, for they can believe it is Injuns you have gone after."

"I think you are right, Dick, and I'll keep dark on the subject of Pawnee Bill being captured again, and Mad Carl not being dead, as we thought."

"As your father has not been feeling just well of late, he had better let me take the boys on the trail."

"Yes, Buckskin Charlie, and I go, too."

"Of course, Dick."

"And you had better take twenty-five men, if you can spare them."

"We have over forty herders now, Dick, so I'll take twenty-four besides you and I, and that will leave enough at home to do good service if they are needed."

"Now you turn in, in my bunk there, and go to sleep, while I strike out for the ranch, and send men to bring the boys from the other camps."

"I'll do it, Charlie, for I was never so tired in my life."

"I feel like a grandfather," and Dick was sound asleep in Buckskin Charlie's bunk in less than five minutes.

Dispatching men to bring eight cowboys from each of the other camps, mounted upon their best horses and well armed, and ordering food for the march prepared at his camp, Buckskin Charlie rode with all haste to Paradise Ranch to lay the facts before Captain Vail.

CHAPTER XX.

BUCKSKIN CHARLIE TO THE RESCUE.

CAPTAIN VAIL had not been feeling well the week past, having been lame from an attack of rheumatism; but he was able to get about with the aid of a cane and seeing Buckskin Charlie coming at a run across the prairies, felt sure

that something was wrong, so went out to the gate to meet him.

"Well, Buckskin Charlie, you ride as though you had bad news."

"I have, sir."

"Ah! Comanches on the war-path?"

"No, sir, but do you see Dick's horse yonder?"

"Yes."

"Well, he got away from Dick yesterday evening at Red Canyon Pass, and just came in ahead of me."

"And my boy?" eagerly asked Captain Vail.

"Is all right, sir, though he walked all night to reach our camp, and the story he brings is startling."

"Out with it, Owens, and let me know at once."

Then Buckskin Charlie told the story as brought by Dick Vail, and the captain listened in utter amazement.

"Dick was not born in the woods, Owens, to be scared by the hoot of an owl; but I can hardly believe he is on the right trail this time."

"Nor did I at first, Captain Vail; but I questioned him closely, watched his every expression and I am sure Dick has seen just what he says he did, while, poor fellow, he is utterly used up and is now asleep in my cabin."

"But Pawnee Bill told us the woman poisoned Mad Carl and he saw him die."

"True, only he did not die, sir, and by some means has again gotten Captain Lillie in his power."

"This is terrible."

"Yes, sir, but I sent messengers to the other camps to get eight men from each, and will take eight from my force, making twenty-five with myself, for I think we ought to give Dick the slip if we can, as he is so tired."

"Do so by all means, Owens, and you must lead, as I am unfit to do so."

"I will, sir, and Dick suggested that Miss May be told nothing about it, but that we are supposed to go on a scout to see what the Indians are about."

"Dick is right, and it will be best."

"I will give out the Indian idea, and keep May and my family in ignorance of what has been done, and Heaven grant you recapture poor Lillie."

"But had you not best take more men?"

"No, sir, twenty-five Cowbow Rangers are a match for all the Raiders of the Rio Grande we may find, for it must be strategy, not force, that gets into their retreat."

"When will you get off?"

"Within an hour after my return, sir, for I am having provisions cooked and will take half a dozen extra horses along."

"Will you go to the Red Canyon Pass?"

"It is some distance out of the way, sir, so I will try and strike the Rio Grande trail before dark, and there can see if Mad Carl and his men have gone along."

"That will tell the story without going to the Red Canyon to pick up the trail."

"You are right, Owens, and I leave all to you with perfect confidence in your ability to rescue Captain Lillie if it can be done."

"We will, sir, if it is to be accomplished," was the firm response of Buckskin Charlie.

"And, by the way, Owens, take a couple of extra men along as couriers, to send me word what you have done."

"Send one back after you have struck their trail, and another from the other side of the Rio Grande, if you find that Mad Carl has made for the mountain retreat of the Raiders."

"I will, sir, but I'll instruct them to keep dark about Pawnee Bill's capture."

"Yes, by all means, and don't forget to give that wild cub of mine the slip if you can."

"He'll challenge me, sure, captain," said Buckskin Charlie, with a laugh.

"I'll take all the blame, Owens, but I do wish him left behind if it can be arranged."

"He's asleep, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then tell them to make no fuss about the cabin and let him sleep until to-morrow if he will."

"Now good-by, and good luck to you, Owens," and the cattle king grasped the hand of Buckskin Charlie, who threw himself upon his horse and started away, while Captain Vail sent a man to catch Dick's runaway horse.

Arriving at the camp Buckskin Charlie found one party had arrived, and he at once drew them all away from his cabin so as not to awaken Dick.

Soon after the second party came in, splendidly mounted and armed for the fray, and Buckskin Charlie told them the whole story.

Then they had dinner, the provisions were

packed, the extra horses brought up, and the two men called to join them who were to act as couriers.

Then the party mounted and rode away, Buckskin Charlie again giving orders at the last moment not to disturb Dick, but to let him sleep as long as he would.

"I guess I'll not be the one ter tell him yer hev gone and left him, cap'n?" said the man left in charge of the camp.

"Ef he don't turn into a buzz-saw when he knows it, then I murmur a gentle lie," another said.

"Look out fer him if he strikes yer trail," a third said, and the party rode off, sorry to leave Dick, but thoroughly convinced that he would be wrathful when he found he had been left behind.

Straight to where he could strike the Rio Grande trail, which the Mad Cowboy must take if he had gone back to Mexico with his prisoner, the cowboys rode.

It was a long ride, and to their regret, in spite of pressing on, they could not reach the trail until after nightfall.

So there they camped until morning, and then the trail told the story, for there was the old tracks going toward the canyon, the more recent ones returning to the Rio Grande.

Daring Dick had made no mistake, and Buckskin Charlie was off to the rescue with his brave Cowboy Rangers.

CHAPTER XXI.

WIDE AWAKE.

NEVER in his life before, not even in babyhood, had Dick Vail passed so long a time in slumber.

He had been going it rather strong on a long hunt before he had his all-night walk, and once he got to sleep he did not wake up until it was again night.

He was a little dazed at first, and did not recall where he was.

Then he realized that he was in Buckskin Charlie's bunk, and so sprung out and drew on his clothes.

He then left the cabin, and found in another one near, a group of cowboys playing cards.

When Dick appeared in the doorway they were silenced, for they saw that he was on the war-path.

The boy was mad clean through, and showed it.

"Bob Brent, where is Buckskin Charlie?" he asked.

"He's gone off on the trail you diskivered, Dickie."

"See here, don't call me Dickie, for my name is D-i-c-k."

"Why did he go without me?"

"Well, he kinder thought you was sick, and yor pa said as how you'd better not go."

"When did he go?"

"This afternoon when the boys had had their dinner."

"Who went with him?"

"Some twenty-four or five of the boys."

Dick turned on his heel and walked away.

He saw a horse standing near, saddled and bridled, and mounting him rode at once toward the ranch.

His father was the only one up when he arrived, and he saw that Dick was both angry and hurt.

"Father, don't you think I have been treated in a mean way, to have Buckskin Charlie and his men run off and leave me asleep?"

"It was done for your good, Dick, for you were badly used up and not able to go."

"Had you done so, it would have made you very ill."

"Now go to bed and get all the rest you can."

Dick saw nothing else to be done, so after a visit to the pantry, where he made the cake and provisions suffer, he betook himself to bed.

He was awakened in the morning by a tap on his door, and heard May Lillie say:

"Dress, Dick, and come down to the arbor, for I have something to tell you."

Dick hastily obeyed and going out to the arbor found May Lillie.

She looked pale and anxious, and said:

"Dick, has not something gone wrong?"

"Well, Buckskin Charlie and the men went off on an Injin hunt, Miss May, and I was asleep, so got left."

"See here, Dick, your horse came home yesterday without you, and I heard you came home last night."

"Yesterday morning Buckskin Charlie came at a run to the ranch and had a long talk with your father, and then went off again like a shot."

"I saw from my window, soon after, a party of eight cowboys going across the prairie toward

Buckskin Charlie's camp, and soon after eight more from the camp in the hills, and both parties seemed anxious to avoid being seen from the house.

"Now I got up early this morning, and was reading in the library when a cowboy came up and your father went out upon the piazza to talk to him."

"He did not know I was there, and he asked him what was the news."

"The answer of the cowboy was that Buckskin Charlie and his men had arrived at the Rio Grande trail just after dark so could not see whether the Mad Cowboy's trail led that way, and went into camp."

"They were in the saddle at dawn and then saw Mad Carl's trail leading toward Red Canyon Pass, and back again, just as you, Dick, had said, and then he, the cowboy, was sent to make that report to your father, and that the Rangers would push on to the rescue with all haste."

"The man had left Buckskin Charlie just after four o'clock, and reached here soon after seven, making the distance in a run all the way."

"Now what does it mean, Dick?"

"Miss May, I won't try to fool you, though I did think it best not to tell you."

"I wish to know all, Dick."

"Oh, I'll tell you the whole truth now I've got to, Miss May."

"I'll begin with my going on the hunt two days ago, and just what kind of game I found."

"Yes, Dick, do not deceive me in anything."

"I won't, Miss May."

And then Dick told the whole story, of his chase after the deer, his discovery of the Rio Grande Raiders, and afterward of seeing Mad Carl and Pawnee Bill.

"My God! a thirteenth time they have captured Gordon!"

"What does it mean, Dick, and why was he coming here?"

"I do not know, Miss May; but I saw him."

Then Dick told of how his horse had broken loose and run away from him and of his long walk through the longer night.

"Poor boy, how you must have suffered, and how hard you tried to help Gordon."

"I'm all right now, Miss May, and won't want any more sleep for a week; but wasn't it a shabby trick in Buckskin Charlie to run off and leave me behind?"

"He did it for your good, Dick."

"I hope he can prove it," was Dick's doleful response.

"Now, Dick, I am going to the Pass."

"Miss May."

"I am going to the camp where you saw the Raiders of the Rio Grande, and see if I can make any discovery."

"As the cowboy said this morning to your father, Buckskin Charlie did not go there, but struck the Rio Grande trail at the nearest point, and finding there that Mad Carl had gone by, he went on in pursuit."

"Now I may be able to discover some clew at the Red Canyon Pass."

"I am with you, Miss May."

"Do you think you had better go, Dick?"

"I think if I don't go, you don't," was the firm reply.

"Well, Dick, we go together," was the reply of the Lariat Queen.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TWO TRAILERS.

MAY LILLIE felt that it had been in kindness that she had not been told of her husband's danger, as also that Dick had been left behind.

But she was not the woman to remain idle while Gordon Lillie was in the power of the Mad Cowboy, and other men going to his rescue.

She resolved, therefore, to follow the cowboys, and made the going to the Pass as an excuse.

She was glad to have Dick, for she knew what a friend in need the boy was, while as a trailer and fighter, one to escape from a tight place, he had richly deserved the name of Little Wonder.

But to get away quietly was the question.

"How shall we do it, Dick?" she asked...

She knew that they must have food and go well prepared.

"I'll fix it," was Dick's reply, and he at once set out upon a scouting expedition.

He knew where the keys of the store-room were kept, so he got them and slipped into the little cabin, away from the house, kept for that purpose.

He had previously placed a blanket under the one window in the rear of the hut, and upon this he dropped a shoulder of bacon, a ham, a bag of sweet potatoes, another of Irish potatoes, a

third of onions, some crackers, flour, coffee, sugar salt and pepper.

These supplies were bundled up in the blanket and carried out back of the stables.

Then a frying-pan, coffee-pot tin cups with spoons and knives and forks were surreptitiously abstracted from the kitchen, almost under the eyes of the old negress who was the cook at Paradise Ranch.

A couple of loaves of fresh bread disappeared mysteriously also, with several pies and a cake, for Dick had an eye to sweets.

His next visit was to the chicken house and several dozen eggs were added to his supplies and packed away in meal.

Then a large canvas tarpaulin was next seized upon, and an extra supply of blankets, after which Dick got more ammunition and congratulated himself upon having done well.

"I've got dead oodles of things salted away, Miss May, and we'll skip to-night when all are gone to bed."

"Now I'll pick out our three horses."

"Three, Dick?"

"Oh yes, Miss May, and we want the best."

"You see the pack will be no slouch, for we are not going to go hungry."

"This isn't Lent, and I've done my fasting."

"Dick, I fear you are making too extensive preparations."

"No, Miss May, we are going to find Captain Lillie and it may take time."

"We can skip to-night and leave a note for father, telling him we have gone after Buckskin Charlie."

"He'll get it when he comes to breakfast to-morrow, and by that time we will have been to the Pass and be off on the trail of the Rio Grande."

"Dick, you are a darling."

"Well, Miss May, I am glad you think so."

"But you slip out to-night, after father has gone to bed, and I'll drop out of my window and have all ready to start, and I guess Buckskin Charlie won't leave me a second time, if I am asleep."

"You are pretty wide-awake now, Dick."

"Yes, Miss May, and I intend to keep awake."

"That was real mean in Charlie, and I'll play a joke on him if it takes me a year, to even it up," and Dick still bemoaned the desertion of him by the cowboys, until May Lillie said:

"Well, I am glad they left you, Dick, as I have you to go with me."

"I never thought of that, Miss May; yes, I am glad too, now you are going."

The day dragged slowly along to the two anxious ones, but Dick busied himself as best he could in getting things to rights, and in picking out the very best horses for the trip.

In this he was decidedly successful, and when night came had his pack all ready and strapped to the Texas saddle he decided to carry along instead of a pack-saddle, in case they rescued Gordon Lillie and he had no horse.

The Little Wonder was a youth to look ahead and plan for emergencies.

At supper Dick appeared to be sleepy, and his father suggested that he should retire early.

"I'll do it, father," he said.

Soon after supper he bade all good-night, gave a sly wink at May Lillie and went off to bed, locking his door after him.

He then donned his riding-suit, and after waiting awhile got out of the window and made his way to the stables, hearing old Aunt Chloe growling at the dogs for having stolen her bread and pies as he went by the kitchen.

Dick laughed and made his way to the stables, and soon had his horses saddled, and the pack secure, the bag of meal containing the eggs being the crowning piece of his triumph.

"I guess I'll surprise Miss May," he said.

Then the horses were hitched outside and Dick returned to wait for May Lillie.

She excused herself when Mrs. Vail and the children retired, and going to her room put on her stout shoes, strapped on her leggings and donned her blue corduroy riding-suit with its short skirt.

Then came her sombrero, and belt of arms, and an army cloak which Gordon had given her along with her india-rubber blanket for wet weather.

Taking up her rifle she watched her chance and cautiously slipped out of the house.

"Here I am, Miss May."

"All right, Dick."

Away they glided in the darkness, and driving the falsely-accused dogs back, for they seemed inclined to follow them, as old Chloe had sent a pan of hot water after them in retaliation for the missing bread and pie, they soon reached the stables.

Uncle Josh, Aunt Chloe's husband, was up at the house in the kitchen, for he always got out of the stable at sunset.

It was the rule of his life, since two of the cowboys some years before had gotten into a quarrel there one day and had drawn and fired together until their revolvers were empty.

Both were killed, and Uncle Josh swore that he had often seen their ghosts, and he had more cause for the assertion than most ghost news have, as Dick had often haunted the stable with a sheet around him just to give Uncle Josh a turn.

The first time Dick played cowboy ghost, Uncle Josh met with a miraculous cure of rheumatism, for though he had been hobbling around on a stick for a week, he stood not on the order of going but went at once, and with the speed of a deer, when Dick gave a cry of agony and started toward him.

So the stables were clear, and mounting their horses, the two daring trailers started off upon their perilous expedition.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE TELL-TALE LETTER.

THROUGH the darkness went Dick and his fair companion, the Queen of the Lariat, determined upon saving Gordon Lillie for the third time from Mad Carl the Cowboy, and who was known now to be Don Desperado, the chief of the Raiders of the Rio Grande.

How Don Desperado had escaped death neither May Lillie or Dick could guess.

But the boy was firm in his statement that he had seen him, and also seen Pawnee Bill, and May did not for a moment doubt him.

They felt guilty at having run off as they had, but well they knew that Captain Vail would never have allowed them to go unattended by cowboys, and these could not be spared from the herds.

May had left a note for Captain Vail, explaining that she knew all, and in her anxiety was going to find out the truth, and Dick had accompanied her, while they were well supplied with provisions and all to make them comfortable, thanks to the foraging skill of the Little Wonder.

Also, she stated that they first intended going to the camp where Dick had seen the Raiders of the Rio Grande, and pick up the trail there.

It would be the third day since the Raiders had been there, she said, but she hoped some clew could be gained which would be of use to them or the cowboys.

Of course they would not expect to accomplish much themselves, only to reach the cowboys.

Such was about the tenor of May Lillie's letter, and this left behind both she and Dick felt relieved in mind.

They pushed on rapidly through the night, for they knew that their horses would have rest after arrival, and camped at a spot which Dick remembered was near where he had gone after the deer.

He arranged May's blankets for her, staked out the horses, and in spite of his assertion that he was not sleepy, was fast asleep as soon as he got into his little blanket bed.

It was just after midnight, and awhile before dawn he awoke.

Rolling up his blankets he saddled the horses and found May ready also, for it was daylight.

He showed her where he had stood when he saw the camp and they at once rode to it.

There were the tracks of the men and horses, and the ashes of the camp-fires, and Dick read signs well.

"They were here a couple of days, I reckon, Miss May."

"It looks so, Dick."

"And they came in this way, from the Rio Grande trail."

"Yes."

"And see, they went on foot from here to the pass, though there are two tracks of several horses."

"I see them, Dick."

"Going and coming."

"Yes."

"Well, we'll follow the trail to the pass."

"It will be best."

And this they did.

Arriving in the canyon the tracks showed where the Mexican Raiders had been in ambush, and there was the trail of the two horses coming from the northward.

"But see there, Dick! oh, see there!"

May Lillie pointed to the body of Lariat Joe,

the bones nearly picked clean by the wolves,

some of the beasts running off with angry yelps

as the two approached the spot.

"A man has been killed here, Miss May."

"Yes, and left unburied."

"I guess Captain Lillie killed him."

"Either that, or he was some one with Gordon."

"That may be, for it was not a Mexican."

"How do you know, Dick?"

"See his hair, and his togs."

"He was an American, I reckon."

"Yes, it would seem so; but he is a human being, Dick, and we must bury him."

"Yes, Miss May, but I wish I had a pitchfork to pick up the remains with; but I'll fix him."

And Dick went off and cut a forked stick with his bowie-knife.

Then they found a place near where a grave could be easily dug, and the torn body was placed in it as decently as it was possible to do, after which the dirt was thrown in and pieces of wood put on top to keep off the wolves.

"Now, Miss May, I am going to examine those two tracks, of the horses crossing from the northward, and see if they lead to the camp of the Raiders."

"That is a good idea, Dick."

The boy set about his task, and the two then followed the trail back to the camp, whither they led.

Still following the tracks of the two horses which had come from the northward, Dick suddenly gave a cry which brought May Lillie quickly to his side.

"What is it, Dick?"

"There is a letter, and it seems to have been placed purposely under that leaf, so as not to attract attention to it from those here, but to be found by those who might be on this trail."

"Dick, you are a wonder," and May picked up the letter.

The address was as follows:

"CAPTAIN GORDON LILLIE,

(Pawnee Bill),

"Chief of Pawnee Cavalry, U. S. Army,

"Fort —.

"By hand of Lariat Joe and important to deliver immediately."

"Oh, Dick!"

"Yes, Miss May."

"This is your father's handwriting."

"So it is."

"What does it mean?"

"Read it and find out, Miss May."

She did so, and her pretty face flushed and paled with anger and indignation, as she cried:

"Dick, this is a forgery, for your father never wrote this letter."

"Never in the world, Miss May."

"Mad Carl is indeed alive, and he forged your father's writing and name."

"This story of my being badly hurt was his trick to get Gordon to come into his trap."

"Yes, Miss May, and it's my opinion that the gent we buried was Lariat Joe."

"I could almost hope so, Dick; but how fortunate that we came here."

"Yes, indeed, and Captain Lillie put that letter there hoping it would be found."

"Maybe he saw you, Dick, over on the hill, for he has wonderful eyes you know."

"Yes he has, and maybe he did see me; but now we know what to do, Miss May, so let us follow on the trail."

"As soon as we have had breakfast, Dick, for we cannot live without eating."

"Lordy! its funny I forgot that, Miss May."

CHAPTER XXIV.

RED-SKIN PARDS.

THE breakfast was cooked, and May was surprised, when Dick, as he expressed it, "sprung ham and eggs upon her," with other things edible she had by no means expected.

They really enjoyed the breakfast, and were preparing to start upon their way when suddenly there came into view a score of red-skins.

Dick saw that running was out of the question.

They were clearly surprised, and so he shouted:

"Quick, Miss May, take a tree and we'll fight it out!"

But May Lillie called out sharply:

"Hold, Dick! they are Pawnees!"

Then in the Pawnee tongue she called to the Indians, who had come to a halt and were examining them with no hostile intention.

What she said caused the Indians to ride quickly toward her, and pressing forward as they dismounted from their ponies, they extended their hands with warm greetings in the Pawnee tongue.

Dick was not up in Pawnee, his stronghold being Comanche, so he was not in the conversation at all until May turned to him and said something to the warriors.

Then they all came forward and grasped Dick's hands, talking Pawnee to him and seeming glad to see him.

"I'm in the dark, Miss May, so you'll have to help me," said Dick, making mental resolve to study Pawnee as soon as the opportunity offered.

"Well, Dick, they are Pawnee soldiers from Gordon's command, and new braves from the tribe."

"They tell me that Gordon was made a major, and given a battalion of Pawnees, and went to the tribe and got his warriors."

"Then he got a letter telling him I was badly hurt, and he started home, and the general sent chief Flying Knife here and twenty of his braves to follow Gordon and come back with him by a trail the general had given him orders to take."

"They said that he left the fort with the man who brought the letter, and they had followed the trail of the horses to the pass, and then as it branched off here had come on and found us."

"I told them all that you had done, and that their white chief was a prisoner, and they know me well and are going with us."

"That settles it, Miss May."

"Yes, for they are splendid trailers, hard fighters, and Flying Knife's band here are known as expert lasso-throwners, and woe be unto the Mexican Raiders if we strike their retreat."

"Oh, Miss May!"

"Yes, Dick."

"We don't have to find Buckskin Charlie and his cowboys."

"Well?"

"The Pawnees are all we want, and we'll make Charlie sorry he didn't wake me up when he left, though I am glad of it now."

Then Dick won the heart of every one of that band of Pawnee warriors, from Flying Knife down to the junior brave, for he unpacked the edibles, and gave them a breakfast that made them happy.

The meal finished the party started upon the trail, Flying Knife himself taking the lead, while May and Dick came next and the warriors followed in single file.

A ride of a couple of hours brought them to the camp of Buckskin Charlie and his men, and where they had come into the Rio Grande trail.

From there on they rode swiftly and camped for rest on the Texas side of the river an hour before dark.

They did not wish to cross until after night-fall, for both Dick and May knew it was best not to be seen.

As for the Pawnees they were ready to follow blindly the lead of the Queen of the Lariat, whom they regarded as one of their tribe, and Dick, to whom they had already given the name of Little Lightning.

After a long rest, and good supper, the Silent Shadowers, as Dick called the Pawnees, in return for the name they had given him, mounted their ponies and fell into line behind the Lariat Queen.

Then May and Dick, taking the lead, started across the river in the darkness.

The crossing was made without accident, and Dick headed straight for the place where they had met, on their other expedition, Pawnee Bill, returning from the retreat of the Raiders of the Rio Grande.

"We will camp there until morning, Miss May," said Dick.

"Yes, and then we can see if the cowboys have gone on and follow their trail, and they may be glad of our aid," was the answer.

The spot was reached after several hours' ride, and as well as they could in the darkness a camping place was found.

A guard of two Pawnees were placed on the trail, to note if any one should pass, and as no fires dared be lighted May and Dick ate their supper as did the Indians in silence and were satisfied with a cold snack.

Over in a hollow a good place was found for the horses, and they were kept saddled and bridled, for all realized the danger of their position there on Mexican territory and not far from the retreat of the Raiders of the Rio Grande.

Suddenly one of the Pawnees came to the side of May and said something in a low tone.

"Dick, Bad Eyes says that he hears horses crossing the stream down the mountain, and they must be coming this way."

"Lasso them!" said Dick, and May responded:

"The very idea."

Then the order was given and the Pawnees took position, their lassoes in hand.

May and Dick were not to be left out of the "lasso-throwing picnic," as the boy expressed it, and also took their place ready for work.

The horses were now heard coming up the steep rocky trail.

They would have to pass among a group of boulders, and here were Dick, May and her Silent Shadowers.

Each one stood with lariat in hand, and watching the trail, waited.

CHAPTER XXV.

DON DESPERADO STRIKES HARD.

WHEN Don Desperado rode away from his retreat, after his recovery from his long and nearly fatal illness, he wended his way toward the City of Mexico, leaving the outlaw officer, Delmar, in command.

He had in view a stroke for revenge and another one for gold.

He left his companions at a secluded hacienda to await his return, and, unknown, went on his way into the city of Mexico.

He was well supplied with gold found among Andrea Bonodel's effects, and rigged himself up as a gentleman in a village where he stopped for the night.

Then he continued on his way, and arriving in the city of Mexico, put up at an obscure hotel.

His next work was to find out, if he could, if Delmar had told him the truth in stating that the Senora Gabriella was the daughter of a rich and prominent Government official.

He first learned, who among the officials had a daughter; then which one had a daughter named Gabriella.

This he discovered by the use of gold, and it then came to him that the Senora Gabriella had been kidnapped by the Raiders of the Rio Grande, and for over two years she had been held by them for large ransom, but, at last, her father had found out where she was a prisoner, had paid an enormous ransom, and she was again at home.

Her return chimed in with the escape of the Senora Gabriella from the retreat in the mountains.

The senorita, as she still was called in Mexico, had brought with her a peon woman who had been kind to her in her long captivity.

"That is the woman I seek—yes, both of them—the beautiful Gabriella and the the peon.

"But, how she has deceived the public, for they believed her a captive, when she was that man's willing wife!

"Now to learn his record!"

So said Don Desperado to himself, and his next step was to discover who his predecessor had been.

Gold was used again, and at last he found out sufficient to convince him that the chief he had slain was the ex-officer and conspirator, Andrea Bonodel.

He heard of how the conspirator had escaped, and then said:

"Yes, that is the woman, and how she loved him!

"Oh! if May had only loved me as Gabriella did that man, happy indeed would I have been, and changed would have been my whole life!

"But it was not to be, and now I live for revenge alone!

"Now, the Senor Garcia has received his daughter back, and so I must kidnap her, demand a ransom of him, have him bring it in person, and then kill him.

"I will get his gold, and then deliver to his daughter, my captive, the body of her father!

"I will also arrange it in some way that the fair Gabriella shall take the life of her faithful peon woman, and know that she did it; then, when she has given me a ransom worthy of her fortune, she can go her way, and my revenge will be satisfied in that quarter.

"Now, I must arrange to have Gabriella and the peon woman kidnapped, and when they are, they shall be taken and delivered to my two men, and another whom I will send there to join them. They are then to bring them to my camp, and I will enter into negotiations with Senor Garcia for the ransom.

"But, first, I must see this fair Gabriella, and know that she is the one I seek."

This the monstrous villain managed to do the next day by passing the house of Senor Garcia just as he and his daughter were going to drive.

Having found ready tools to carry out his plans, for Mexico is full of men eager for such

work, the arch plotter started upon his return to his retreat.

Visiting the hacienda where he had left his men, he bade them await there the coming of a third, with orders. This done, he returned alone to his retreat.

Through Officer Delmar he picked out a man for the work and dispatched him to join the two at the hacienda, and there await the coming of his other hirelings with his captives, whom they were to carry to the retreat.

Don Desperado at once set about arranging his next blow of revenge. This was against Gordon Lillie.

"There are several Americans in the band, Delmar?"

"Yes, chief."

"Name a good one, a man whom I can depend upon for a very important work."

"There is Lariat Joe, señor."

"Send him here."

Lariat Joe was not a beauty, nor had he a redeeming trait that showed itself in his face or make-up.

But after some conversation with the man Don Desperado made up his mind that he would do.

Lariat Joe knew the trails well upon the other side of the river, and as he was to go northward he did not hesitate to accept the duty offered him, for a large consideration, payable upon his return.

Had it been to have gone into the Texas settlements Lariat Joe would have drawn the line, for he appeared to have a holy horror of the society in the Lone Star State.

So Joe was supplied with his forged letter, given his orders, and was told that Don Desperado and a number of his men would be on hand to meet him and Pawnee Bill in Red Canyon Pass.

That this well-planned plot was carried to a successful termination the reader has already discovered, and Don Desperado arrived in his retreat with his prisoner to find that the Senorita Gabriella and the peon woman had not yet reached his outlaw camp.

"Having avenged myself on her, then I will be at liberty to strike at those on the Texas side of the river," Don Desperado had said, and he felt in real good humor with himself at the thought of the revenge he had in anticipation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COWBOY SHADOWERS.

THE party of Cowboy Rangers under Buckskin Charlie had pressed on along the trail, crossed the Rio Grande, and gone up toward the outlaws' retreat.

They had reached the spot where two nights after May Lillie and her Silent Shadowers halted, and then held a council of war.

They dared not attempt to take the retreat in the darkness, after what Pawnee Bill had told them of how it was guarded, which he discovered when a prisoner there before, so it was decided to go to a quiet camp and guard the trail by day and night, hoping to capture some one either going to the retreat or coming from it.

In the darkness this was not easy to find, but after some time they did reach a place that looked secure, and the horses were taken into hiding while the men took up positions as best they could.

When the day dawned Buckskin Charlie discovered that they had struck the very spot.

They were in a canyon which the trail to the retreat crossed; but there was neither water nor grass near.

They were hidden from view of any outlaw sentinels who might be upon the mountains above, and so sat down to watch and wait.

For what privations they would have to suffer they did not care, so that they accomplished their errand, the getting into the outlaw retreat and rescue of Pawnee Bill.

They did not count the odds which they might have to meet, for they depended upon a complete surprise and their revolvers at close quarters.

So they bided their time and prayed for an outlaw only to come along, no matter which way he came from.

"If he does not tell what he knows, then I don't know how to make him," Buckskin Charlie said in his off-hand way.

And the cowboys who knew Buckskin Charlie well decided that any outlaw who fell into his hands would tell all he knew.

The day passed away on dry rations for horses and men, but there was no complaining.

The horses were muzzled to keep them from neighing for water and food, and the men gave them a bite of their rations and what grass they could gather among the rocks.

horses, throw what booty on them you can, and we will take the secret pass back to the Rio and cross before dawn.

"There is no time to lose— Ah, Dick, my Little Wonder, you are here!"

"Yes, captain, and Miss May, too, for she is up at the cottage with a lady captive of Don Desperado."

"Then she is avenged, Dick, for I killed him. Now help me get the men together and away, for we must not be caught on Mexican soil when day dawns."

CONCLUSION.

THE retreat was made with all haste possible from the outlaw stronghold, for there were a couple of hundred horses captured, and half of these were loaded with plunder taken from the bandits' storehouse.

Pawnee Bill led the way with Dick, while May, happy as she could be, rode by the side of Gabriella, conversing earnestly with her as they went along.

Behind them came Wanda the peon, and the Pawnees, with the led horses following, while Buckskin Charlie and his men brought up the rear.

Two dead cowboys and three Pawnees were strapped on the backs of horses, to be taken to Texan soil for burial, and a few wounded men rode behind their comrades for support.

Don Desperado and his dead were left where they had fallen, when the cabins in the stronghold had been set on fire.

Arriving at the river, the party crossed before dawn, and the cowboys pushed on with their captured horses and booty, not daring to halt.

Pawnee Bill and his Indians halted, and the ladies were allowed to rest for a few hours.

Then they had breakfast, and Gabriella and Wanda bade farewell to May and the others, and recrossed the river to join a party of Mexican cavalry seen on the other bank, and thus make their way under escort back to their home.

The cavalry happened to be a party sent in pursuit of the kidnappers of Gabriella, and the officer in command told her that her father had halted for rest at a hacienda some leagues away, so that the lonely Mexican woman felt that her sorrows were at last at an end.

Back to Paradise Ranch went Pawnee Bill and his braves as an escort to May and Dick, and the welcome they received repaid them for all they had gone through.

Pawnee Bill told his story, and ended by saying:

"It was justice that he should fall by my hand, and now, May, I am avenged for the wrong he has done us."

After several days' rest Pawnee Bill departed with his Red Cavalry for the fort, and having organized his battalion of Indian soldiers rendered good service with them in the field during the year that followed.

Then he resigned his position and went after May, taking her to the home he had made ready for her in the Indian Territory.

There Daring Dick a year later was their welcome visitor for a few days. The Little Wonder was on his way to enter West Point as a cadet.

THE END.

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